

# Explorations: Student Experiences of Accommodation – Research Report

Office for Students

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# 1 Executive summary

This report presents findings from a study commissioned by the Office for Students (OfS) and delivered by IFF Research. The research explores first-year students' accommodation experiences in England; it investigates their decision-making, engagement with and understanding of accommodation contracts, satisfaction with accommodation, and perceptions of value for money. The OfS commissioned this research to develop a more robust, student-centred evidence base to inform its regulatory approach. The findings reflect students' experiences during the 2025/26 academic year.

The research used a mixed-methods design, combining an online survey with qualitative research. An online survey was conducted with 1,293 first-year students studying at English universities and colleges and living in rented accommodation, including provider-maintained, provider-commissioned, private student and other private rented accommodation.<sup>1</sup> Quotas and weighting were applied to ensure the data broadly reflects the population of first-year students in England by key socio-demographic characteristics. To add depth and context, the study also included three focus groups and three depth interviews with 21 students across different accommodation types.

## Accommodation decision-making

Most students were satisfied with the accommodation options available to them (80 per cent) and secured their first-choice accommodation (80 per cent). However, students attending their insurance-choice institution or entering via clearing often faced more limited options, sometimes leading to compromises that reduced satisfaction. Practical considerations were the principal drivers of students' accommodation choices, especially the cost of rent and bills (important to 90 per cent), proximity to the university or college (87 per cent), and bedroom features such as having an ensuite bathroom (86 per cent). While social factors were less prominent in the survey (73 per cent), qualitative findings highlighted accommodation's role in supporting friendship formation and social integration. Students in university or college-maintained accommodation were more likely to report satisfaction with the choice available to them than those in private student accommodation or other private rented accommodation (85 per cent, vs. 70 per cent and 57 per cent respectively).

Accommodation costs also influenced wider study choices: a large majority of students (86 per cent) said expected accommodation costs affected where they chose to study, with over a quarter (27 per cent) identifying this as a primary factor. However, qualitative evidence suggests cost was typically one consideration among several, rather than the sole driver. Universities' accommodation services were the main route through which students found accommodation (69 per cent), and university or college websites were the most commonly used information source (also 69 per cent), alongside informal sources such as advice from friends and family and student-generated social media content.

## Knowledge and awareness of accommodation contracts

Students appeared to have some uncertainty or confusion about who their accommodation provider was, and who they held a contract with, as many provided conflicting answers to these two questions. For example, among those who reported living in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a

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<sup>1</sup> For clarity, primarily to distinguish accommodation providers from higher education providers, we may refer to higher education providers as 'universities or colleges' throughout this report.

university or college, one-in-three (36 per cent) reported that their contract was with their university or college, not a private provider. Students reported high levels of engagement with their accommodation contracts (97 per cent had read their contract at least in part). However, qualitative evidence suggests that actual engagement was often more superficial, with many students skimming contracts, mostly relying on parents or other family to interpret terms. Those who did not think it was important to read their contracts felt confident they would not miss anything problematic by not doing so.

Students mostly reported contracts were clear (by 93 per cent), but fewer found them fair (70 per cent). Those living in university or college-maintained accommodation were more likely to view contracts as fair (75 per cent) than those in accommodation privately rented or privately maintained on behalf of a provider (61 and 62 per cent, respectively). Students most often cited fees, deposits and house rules as unclear or unfair, while lengthy documents and legalistic language were key barriers to understanding and engaging with contracts. Some accommodation maintained by universities or colleges, or on their behalf by private providers, offered support to help students better understand their obligations (e.g. induction sessions and accommodation handbooks).

Most students felt confident that they understood their rights in principle (89 per cent); however, fewer felt confident about how to act if those rights were breached (77 per cent), perhaps reflecting a disconnect between perceived knowledge of their contractual entitlements and their actual understanding of processes they should follow to enforce their rights. Both survey and qualitative evidence show that some students did not challenge providers when issues arose, due to uncertainty about escalation routes or a belief that issues were not serious enough to pursue.

### Satisfaction with accommodation and issues experienced

A large majority of students were satisfied with their accommodation experience (87 per cent). Student satisfaction was highest with the location of accommodation and how safe they felt in and around their accommodation (both 83 per cent), but lowest with the cost and accessibility of laundry facilities (63 per cent). Qualitative evidence found that social aspects of accommodation, including shared spaces and organised activities, were central to positive experiences.

Despite high overall satisfaction, most students had experienced at least one issue with accommodation quality (61 per cent), commonly relating to appliances, maintenance, facilities or cleanliness. Most students who experienced problems took action (81 per cent), usually by reporting issues to accommodation providers (37 per cent) or a central university or college team such as an accommodation department or other student services (23 per cent). Students felt positively about the ease of reporting issues to their provider (80 per cent were satisfied), but were less satisfied with the speed of resolution (69 per cent). Within the survey sample, students in university or college-maintained accommodation and private student accommodation generally reported more responsive and effective issue resolution than those in the wider private rental sector.

Students generally felt accommodation had a positive impact on their lives, particularly in terms of social integration (75 per cent agreed this had a positive impact), commuting time (74 per cent) and their sense of belonging (71 per cent). However, a notable minority reported negative impacts on sleep (14 per cent) and mental health (11 per cent). Within the survey sample, those living in university or college-maintained accommodation were more likely to feel their accommodation positively impacted their academic performance than those living in any other type of accommodation (71 per cent compared to 66 per cent overall).

## Perceived value for money

Around three-in-four (73 per cent) students felt that their accommodation represented good value for money (9 per cent felt it was poor value for money), though perceptions varied by student characteristics and region. Value for money was closely linked to perceptions of accommodation quality and transparency of costs. Factors affecting student perceptions of poor value included non-resolution of maintenance issues, unexpected additional charges, or costly laundry services.

While two-in-three (68 per cent) students reported that they found it easy to cover accommodation costs, around one-in-seven (15 per cent) did report that it was difficult. Many students reported relying on family support, reducing energy usage or working additional hours to help them cover costs.

## 2 Introduction and methodology

### Introduction

This report presents findings from an exploration of first-year students' accommodation experiences at higher education providers in England. The research was commissioned by the Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of higher education in England, and conducted by IFF Research, an independent research agency.

Students' accommodation experiences play a critical role in shaping their overall higher education experience and outcomes, with important implications for equality of opportunity. The purpose of this report is to explore students' decision-making processes around accommodation, their understanding of their accommodation contracts, their satisfaction with where they live, and their perceptions of value for money.

In its regular conversations with students, the OfS heard directly about the central importance of accommodation to their higher education experience. Previous sector research has highlighted a range of challenges associated with first-year student accommodation, including issues of affordability and quality, and the wider impact of accommodation on students' academic engagement and social lives. For example, research by Save the Student has identified accommodation costs as a significant threat to student wellbeing and continuation in higher education, while research by Knight Frank Research suggests that accommodation plays a key role in students' decision-making and in shaping positive academic and social outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Against this backdrop, the OfS commissioned this research to develop a more robust and student-centred evidence base to inform its regulatory approach to accommodation.

The study is designed to strengthen the OfS's understanding of:

- The issues students face in their accommodation and how these affect their academic experience and wider student life;
- The extent to which student accommodation contracts comply with students' consumer rights under relevant consumer protection legislation, and how well equipped students are to understand and exercise these rights;
- The influence of information provided, and commitments made, by higher education providers regarding accommodation and accommodation costs on students' higher education choices;
- Whether student accommodation represents value for money overall and whether students would choose the same accommodation again.

The report focuses on the views of first-year students in the 2025/26 academic year, and findings reflect students' personal perceptions of their accommodation within their specific higher education contexts. It provides the OfS with a picture of first-year student accommodation experiences, to inform

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<sup>2</sup> Save the Student (2025), National Student Accommodation Survey 2025, <https://www.savethestudent.org/money/surveys/national-student-accommodation-survey-2025.html> [Accessed April 2026]. Knight Frank (2025), UK Student Accommodation Outlook, <https://www.knightfrank.co.uk/research/reports/uk-student-accommodation-outlook-report-1663> [Accessed April 2026].

future policy and regulatory practice and support higher education providers to better meet students' needs and expectations.

## Methodology

This exploration used a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. It draws on data from a survey of 1,293 students, focus groups involving 18 students and three depth interviews. Students involved in the research were in the first year of their studies on a below-degree level or undergraduate course at an English higher education provider.

Students in scope for the research were those living in one of the following types of accommodation:

- University or college-maintained accommodation;
- Accommodation privately maintained on behalf of university / college;
- Private student accommodation; and
- Another type of privately rented accommodation (i.e. landlord or letting agency).<sup>3,4</sup>

These groups were the focus, as the OfS's regulatory oversight relates to accommodation owned, maintained by or managed by or on behalf of universities or colleges. Additionally, those in privately rented or another type of accommodation were included, despite being outside the OfS's regulatory oversight. Those living in parental / guardian homes or who owned their own home were excluded, as they are outside the OfS's regulatory remit. We created a separate category of accommodation offered by the provider but privately managed by a third party on its behalf, to categorise students living in private student accommodation. These students might have otherwise self-categorised as living in either provider-maintained accommodation or private student accommodation.

For clarity, primarily to distinguish accommodation providers from higher education providers, we refer to higher education providers as 'universities or colleges' throughout this report.

## Student survey

An online survey was conducted in March 2026 of 1,293 first year students attending an English university or college.

Students were invited to take part in the survey through a combination of survey panels and an online student network. To ensure the achieved sample was broadly representative according to socio-demographic characteristics, respondents were invited so as to achieve minimum quota targets by different socio-demographic characteristics. Maximum quotas were also applied by screening out respondents with specific characteristics when sufficient responses had been achieved from those groups. See Table 8.1 in Annex A: Respondent and participant profile for a full breakdown of responses by socio-demographic characteristic.

A robust quality assurance process was also put in place to ensure only legitimate, in-scope responses were included in the research. Specific steps were taken both in-survey and in a post-

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<sup>3</sup> Students were also able to self-categorise into an 'Other' accommodation category if they felt the options given did not apply to them. However, those who said they were living in their parental / guardian home or who owned their own home were screened out as they were out of scope for the research.

<sup>4</sup> The first three categories constitute Purpose-Built Student Accommodation.

survey review of responses. Within the survey, all screening questions were asked in a non-leading way<sup>5</sup>, and two ‘trap-door’ questions were built in to capture inattentive respondents. Post-survey, responses were ruled as a ‘quality-assurance fail’ if they failed three or more of a pre-determined set of checks. In addition, respondents who failed two of these checks were flagged for manual quality review by a member of the research team to determine whether their response should be retained or removed. The post-survey quality assurance process resulted in the removal of 64 low-quality responses.

As well as setting quotas, weighting was applied to the data to ensure it was broadly representative of the population of students in their first year of higher education in England.<sup>6</sup> A Random Iterative Method (RIM) approach was applied to correct for a slight oversampling of female students and an oversampling of those whose parents had a higher education qualification. A more detailed overview of the weighting approach can be found in Annex B. Population figures were taken from Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student data related to the 2024/25 cohort, the most recently available year at the time of the study.<sup>7</sup>

All reported differences within survey data are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level, unless otherwise stated. This means that statistically we can be confident that 95 per cent of the time, differences are ‘real’ differences and not a result of findings being based on a sample of the target population (those who responded to the survey).

The survey had a headline margin of error of  $\pm 2.7$  percentage points for a finding of 50 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level, and  $\pm 1.6$  percentage points for findings of 90 per cent/10 per cent. Margin of error provides the range of true results that a survey may provide for each finding in the survey. This means we can be 95 per cent confident that the true figure for a 50 per cent finding lies within plus or minus 2.7 percentage points of the figures generated through the survey, and within 1.6 percentage points for a finding at 90 per cent or 10 per cent.

### Student focus groups and interviews

Focus groups and interviews were also carried out as part of this exploration, involving 21 participants in total. These were conducted in March 2026. The qualitative strand explored similar themes to the survey but enabled us to gather more in-depth views about students’ accommodation experiences.

Focus groups were conducted with three cohorts of first year undergraduate students, organised by their accommodation type. Groups were organised in this way to illuminate key areas of similarity or difference between students in different types of accommodation, as only the types covered in groups 1 and 2 are in the scope of the OfS’s regulatory remit.

- **Group 1:** those living in accommodation maintained by their higher education provider (“university / college-maintained accommodation”);

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the survey did not ask ‘Are you currently in full-time education?’ but used a condensed form of the Office for National Statistics question regarding current economic activity to screen-out respondents not studying full-time.

<sup>6</sup> Population targets used to weight the data are included in Annex B.

<sup>7</sup> HESA (2026), Who is Studying in HE, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he> [Accessed March 2026].

- **Group 2:** those living in accommodation managed by a private student accommodation company on behalf of a higher education provider (“accommodation privately maintained on behalf of university / college”); and
- **Group 3:** those living in private accommodation rented from either a student accommodation company (“private student accommodation”), which includes private Purpose-Build Student Accommodation (PBSA), or private landlord or agency (“private rented accommodation”).

A further three in-depth interviews were carried out with students in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a university or college and in private student accommodation. These additional interviews took place to better explore the views and experiences of students in accommodation types that were less well represented in the focus groups. Some difficulties accurately identifying students’ accommodation type in focus group recruitment reflected the complexity identified elsewhere in the research around students’ often misunderstanding who their accommodation provider was and who their accommodation contract was with. The spread of participant characteristics, including accommodation type, is shown in Table 8.2 in Annex B.

### Limitations of methodology

Although the research draws on a diverse and broadly representative sample of first-year students, limitations in the underlying population data in terms of accommodation type (as noted in the weighting discussion) mean comparisons between accommodation types describe patterns within the achieved sample. They should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative of accommodation provision nationally. Differences in accommodation type may also partly reflect socio-demographic differences in the students who access those types of accommodation.

The report also does not address the experiences of students living in their parental / guardian home or their own home, distance learners or those studying part-time, whose experiences may differ from the population of first year students considered “in-scope” for this research.

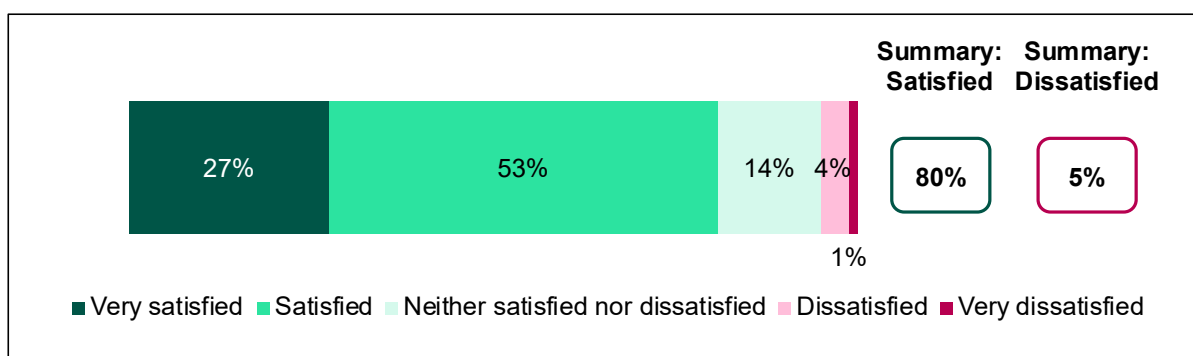
This research is not compared with wider population data, such as the wider population of students or renters, so it is not possible to assess whether the findings discussed here may differ in the broader population.

### 3 Accommodation decision-making

#### Satisfaction with choice of accommodation

The majority of students surveyed (80 per cent) reported being satisfied with the choice of accommodation available to them when they were deciding where to live, including 27 per cent who were very satisfied (Figure 3.1). Only a small proportion (5 per cent) were dissatisfied with the range of choice.

**Figure 3.1 Students' satisfaction with the choice of accommodation available to them when they were deciding where to live**



A3. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the choice of accommodation available to you when deciding where to live? Base: All students (1,293).

In terms of difference in views in choice of accommodation by student characteristics, white students (83 per cent) were more likely to be satisfied than non-white students (77 per cent). Additionally, students who had a parental history of higher education were significantly more likely (88 per cent) to report that they were satisfied with the choice of accommodation available than those whose parents were not educated to degree level (75 per cent).

Students in the achieved sample who were living in university or college-maintained accommodation (85 per cent) were more likely than those living in private student accommodation or other private rented accommodation to report satisfaction with the choice of accommodation available to them (70 per cent and 57 per cent respectively).

The qualitative findings largely reflect the survey findings, as students typically felt they had a reasonable range of accommodation options and did not generally report any difficulty finding accommodation that met their needs or wants. The exception to this was students who were attending a university or college which was their insurance choice or which they entered through clearing. These students reported having reduced choice as the accommodation offered by their university or college, which would have met their needs, had filled up. Some of them therefore entered university or college accommodation they would not otherwise have chosen, while others opted to prioritise access to certain facilities over living in university or college accommodation and therefore selected a private student accommodation option.

“There are a few [university accommodation options] that are more social than other ones or some that have better amenities or look modern compared to other ones. So, they’re the

ones that everyone would typically want to go for [...] at the time I was going through clearing, so there were not really a lot of options for me.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

“I think by the time that I had found out that it was my insurance choice and decided that I would go to [university] and I wouldn't go into clearing [...] all of my options [...] at the university] were kind of full.”

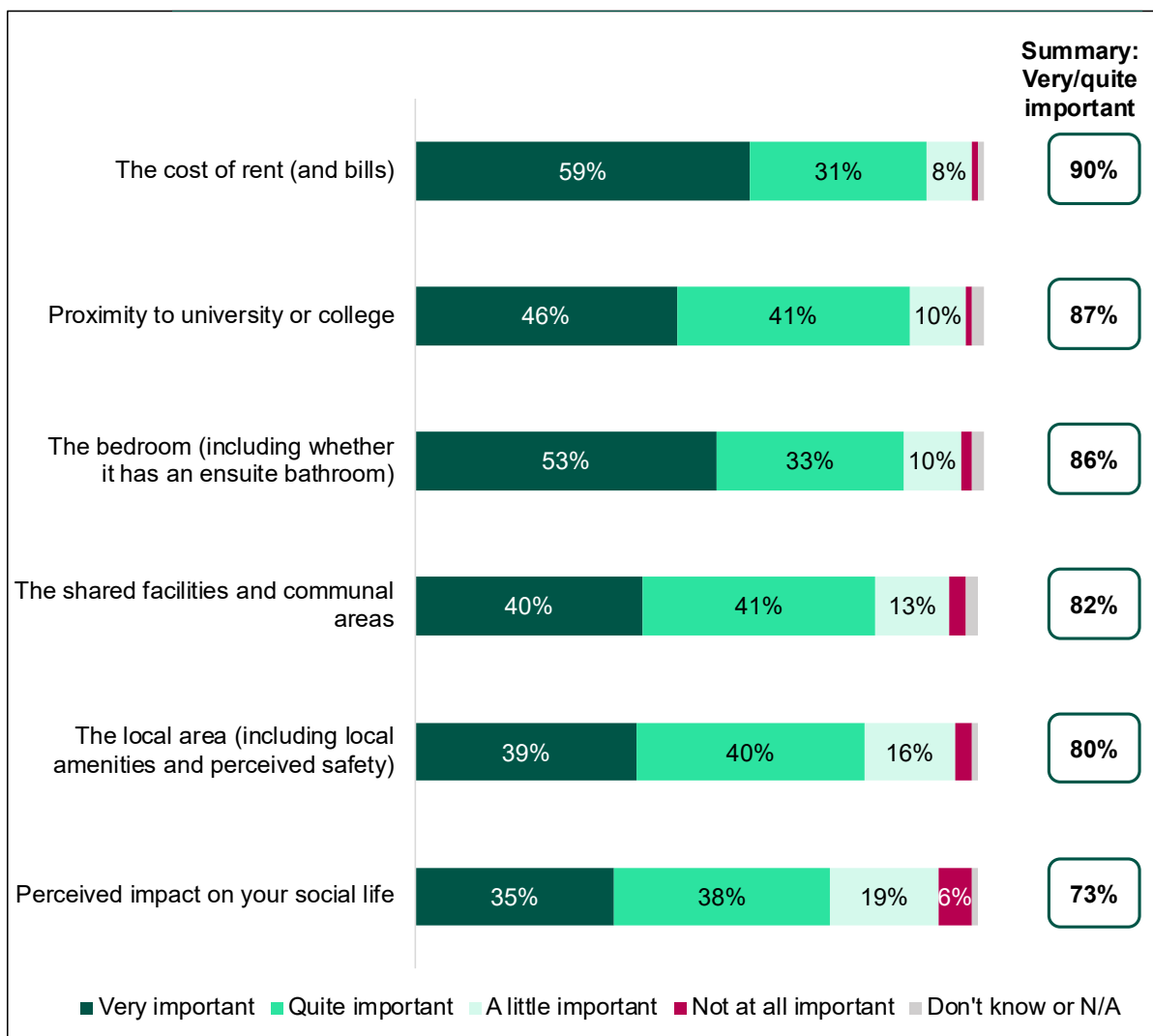
#### **Student in private accommodation (student accommodation company)**

The majority of students surveyed (80 per cent) reported that they got their first choice of accommodation, while 17 per cent reported that they did not. There were some differences in the likelihood of students securing their first choice of accommodation by socio-demographic characteristics. For example, white students were more likely than non-white students to secure their first choice (85 per cent compared to 74 per cent), and students studying in regions outside of London were more likely than those in London to secure their first choice (82 per cent compared to 75 per cent).

#### **Important factors in decision-making**

Students reported that a range of factors were important when deciding which accommodation to live in, as shown in Figure 3.2. The cost of rent and bills was considered the most important, cited by nine-in-ten students (90 per cent), while a large majority also considered the proximity to the university or college (87 per cent), and their bedroom (including whether it had an ensuite) (86 per cent) to be important. The least important factor was the accommodation's perceived impact on students' social lives (although 73 per cent still reported it as important).

**Figure 3.2 Students’ perceived importance of different factors when deciding which accommodation to live in**



A5. How important or unimportant were the following factors when deciding which accommodation to live in? Base: All students (1,293). Responses under 4 per cent not shown.

Factors that were considered important varied between certain types of student, as follows:

- Proximity to university or college:** this was more important to students whose parents had a higher education degree (91 per cent) compared to those whose parents did not (83 per cent).
- Bedroom,** including whether it had an ensuite bathroom: students aged 30 and over were less likely than average to consider this important (72 per cent compared to 86 per cent average and 87 per cent of those aged 20 and under); surveyed students in any purpose-built student accommodation considered this more important compared to those in other private rented accommodation (87 per cent of those in university or college-maintained accommodation, 92 per cent in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a university or college and 84 per cent in privately maintained accommodation, compared to 72 per cent).
- Shared facilities and communal areas:** international students were more likely than domestic students to consider this factor important (86 per cent compared to 81 per cent).

- **Local area:** international students were more likely than domestic students to consider this an important factor in decision-making (90 per cent compared to 77 per cent); students aged 20 and under were less likely than average to see this as important (77 per cent compared to 80 per cent average).

There were several factors that emerged in the focus groups as particularly important for students when choosing their accommodation. Despite this being the least important factor among students surveyed, students often talked about considering how their choice of accommodation would help them integrate socially and enable them to make friends as an important factor, as well as the proximity of accommodation to students' campuses or other amenities. Additionally, students in the focus groups explained that having an ensuite bathroom helped address concerns about privacy and personal hygiene, and alleviated anxieties around sharing facilities with unfamiliar people. Those who were living in accommodation which was university or college-maintained or privately maintained on their university or college's behalf, noted the advantage of living with other students attending the same university or college for developing social connections.

“There's more people from my specific university and first years, whereas the private ones, they are a bit more expensive and it's a mix between people in different universities, which I just thought, I wanted to meet people in my university.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

Among students in the focus groups, it was commonly acknowledged that all accommodation types were expensive and there was rarely a “cheap” option. Some said they made the decision to spend more on their accommodation to have access to facilities and amenities that mattered to their comfort and student experience.

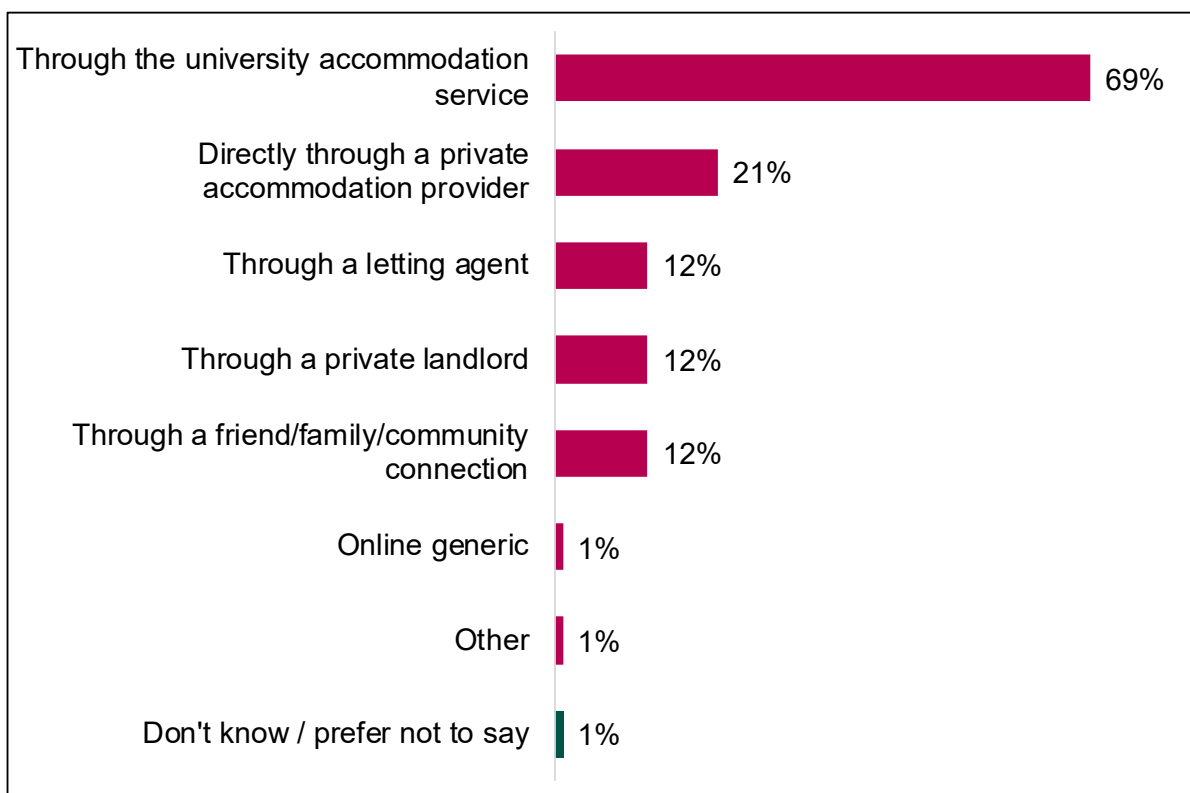
“It's expensive, it's £160 a week, but that's one of the cheapest ones if you want a private bathroom. And I don't think I could share a bathroom with strangers.”

#### **Student in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a university or college**

### **How students decided which accommodation to live in**

Most students found their accommodation through their university accommodation service (69 per cent), followed by one-in-five (21 per cent) who found it directly through a private accommodation provider. Other less common ways of finding accommodation included through a family or friend connection (12 per cent), through a letting agent (12 per cent) and through a private landlord (12 per cent).

**Figure 3.3 How students found their current accommodation**



A1. How did you find your current accommodation? Base: All students (1,293).

There were notable differences between different types of students in how likely they were to find their accommodation through the university accommodation service. White students were more likely than non-white students to find accommodation through their university or college accommodation service (72 per cent compared to 64 per cent), as were students whose parents had a history of higher education (74 per cent compared to 66 per cent of those whose parents did not have degree-level qualifications) and domestic students (71 per cent compared to 60 per cent of international students). Additionally, students with a long-term health condition or disability were more likely than students without such a condition or disability to find their accommodation through a private landlord (17 per cent compared to 11 per cent).

The most common source of information used by students when deciding what type of accommodation to live in was the university or college website (69 per cent). Other sources included through friends or family (34 per cent), a private accommodation provider website (27 per cent), and social media (25 per cent).

Findings from the focus groups also showed that students relied on several sources of information to help them decide what accommodation to live in. Most had engaged with formal information sources from university accommodation services or private companies, such as information available on websites, in emails during pre-induction periods, or from accommodation tours or talks at open days. It was also normal to get information through friends and family who had been to university, or through student-generated content on social media, with TikTok being named multiple times. In addition, one student noted how some private student accommodation companies created social media content to market their accommodation offering, and the information shared in this format had been helpful in their search.

“My brother went to university a couple of years before me, and he stayed in a shared bathroom one. So, there was like, I don't know, eight people, two bathrooms and he really wasn't a fan of that. So, my sort of thinking was that I prefer to get the one with an ensuite.”

#### **Student in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a university or college**

Students tended to place most trust in the perspectives of others in their networks (e.g. friends and family) in terms of what they should prioritise, and also felt that information shared by other students online (e.g. TikTok) would help them understand what living in different types of accommodation is actually like. In a few cases, this related to students feeling the information universities or colleges shared was not thorough enough, for example by only opening one or two accommodation options for open day visits.

“When you go and tour campus, only a few accommodations are available to see, and they're normally the ones that are really close to campus, like on site, which are normally the expensive ones. So, it would be nicer if all the accommodations were open to have a look at on open days.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

“I didn't actually view my accommodation before moving in, so I got a lot of my information off TikTok because I thought I trusted students in uni rooms more than websites. But the websites are really informative, like they tell you all your facilities and they're pretty easy.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

### **How choice of accommodation influenced choice of university or college**

As well as being an important factor for students when choosing between different accommodations, expected accommodation costs factored into students' decisions about which university or college to attend. The large majority of students (86 per cent) said that expected accommodation costs had some influence on their decision, including over a quarter (27 per cent) who said it was one of the main factors in their decision.

Some groups of students were more likely than others to report that cost was a primary influence when deciding which university or college to attend. Specifically: male students compared to female students (31 per cent compared to 24 per cent); white students compared to non-white students (29 per cent compared to 23 per cent); students with a parental history of higher education compared to those without (35 per cent compared to 19 per cent); and students without a long-term health condition or disability compared to disabled students (29 per cent compared to 21 per cent).

Findings from the qualitative research show that accommodation choice in general had some influence on students' decisions about which university or college to attend, but it was not seen as a primary influence. Where students chose to study was more likely based on various other factors first and foremost, such as course content, reputation of the provider and location.

“I won't say it [accommodation choice] was the leading factor, but it was like important in the process of elimination, I think.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

## 4 Knowledge and awareness of accommodation contracts

### Knowledge of contractual relationships and engagement with contracts

Surveyed students appeared confident overall identifying who their accommodation contract or rental agreement was with, with only 1 per cent of respondents saying they did not know who their contract was with. However, there were inconsistencies between this data and students' responses when asked about the type of accommodation they live in, as shown in Table 4.1.

For example, while the vast majority of those surveyed who said they lived in university or college-maintained accommodation said they had a contract with their university or college (89 per cent) as would be expected, 9 per cent said they had a contract with a private student accommodation provider. There appeared more uncertainty among those who reported living in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a university or college, with 36 per cent of this group reporting their contract was with their university or college, not a private provider. Similarly, 11 per cent who lived in private student accommodation reported having a contract with their university or college, and a quarter said their contract was with a private landlord (14 per cent) or letting agent (7 per cent).

In interviews and focus groups, a couple of students living in private student accommodation were aware of the company that managed it but were uncertain whether or not their university or college had a partnership with the accommodation provider. These patterns indicate that some students may be unclear about the relationship between the accommodation they live in, the organisation managing it, and who they hold a contract with.

**Table 4.1 Students' accommodation type by who they reported holding an accommodation contract or rental agreement with**

		Students' reported type of accommodation			
		University or college-maintained accommodation	Accommodation privately maintained on behalf of university or college	Private student accommodation	Other privately rented accommodation
Who students reported holding an accommodation contract or rental agreement with	My university or college	89%	36%	11%	1%
	A private student accommodation provider	9%	60%	64%	5%
	A private landlord	1%	3%	14%	57%
	A letting agent acting on behalf of a private landlord	0%	1%	7%	26%
	No accommodation contract or rental agreement	1%	0%	0%	7%
	Other	0%	0%	0%	4%
	Total	100%	100%	96% <sup>a</sup>	100%

S6. Which of the following best describes your current housing situation while you are studying? Base: all students (1,293). / B1. Who is your accommodation contract or rental agreement with? Base: all students (1,293). <sup>a</sup>4% of those who said they lived in private student accommodation responded 'Don't know' when asked who their contract or agreement is with.

Of those who said they had an accommodation contract or rental agreement (99 per cent), the most common type was a term-time only contract, typically between 39 and 44 weeks (43 per cent), followed by a contract for the whole academic year (e.g., September to August) (28 per cent). Only a minority of students had a 12-month contract (17 per cent), and a small proportion had a six-month contract (8 per cent).

### Level of engagement with contracts

Almost all students with a contract or agreement reported they had at least partially read their contract when they signed it (97 per cent). Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed (63 per cent) said that they had read their contract in detail and a third (33 per cent) skim-read it or only read parts, though some groups were more likely to report having read their contract in detail than others. This was the case for white students (68 per cent), compared with students of mixed ethnicity (47 per cent) or those who were Asian or Asian British (54 per cent), those without a long-term health condition or disability (65 per cent), compared with students with such a condition or disability (56 per cent), and those with a parental history of higher education (75 per cent), compared with those without one (52 per cent).

It was also more common for those surveyed who were living in university or college-maintained accommodation (65 per cent) or private rented accommodation (70 per cent) to have read their contract in detail than those in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a university or college (51 per cent).

Despite the high level of engagement reported by students in the survey, evidence from interviews and focus groups indicated that students' actual individual engagement with accommodation contracts may be more limited.

Among those who had engaged more thoroughly, several relied on a trusted person such as a family member to read or interpret the contract on their behalf; some explained those who helped them had professional knowledge, for example from experience as lawyers or landlords, that made them well placed to advise. A few who had not read it at all themselves relied on a family member doing so on their behalf to relay key points about their contractual responsibilities and the providers' obligations. Some also mentioned that it was commonplace among their friends to receive help in this way.

“If I'm honest [I did not read it] much, because my dad took that upon himself anyway to read. So, he said he'd do it for me just to make sure everything was okay.”

#### **Student in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a provider**

“I got my dad to go through it with me because he kind of deals with stuff like that anyways. And he even said it's not a very well written tenancy agreement in the first place.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

These findings suggest that the high levels of reported engagement in the survey should be interpreted with caution, as some students may have overstated their personal level of contract engagement or answered on the basis of support received from others. This has further implications for students' ability to understand their contracts, addressed later in this chapter.

Aside from help from family, a small number of students sought out help from other sources to understand their contract terms. A couple of students had used a Generative AI tool to explain the contract in straightforward terms. A couple were also aware of information they could access from their accommodation provider to help, but did not seem to have made use of this.

“I put the agreement through ChatGPT and used AI to summarise or highlight what's important and what's not, just to read in between the lines... before uni, my parents have always been in my head about, before signing any contracts, make sure you read the blueprint... I just wanted to make sure I wasn't signing my life away, essentially.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

“I'm pretty sure there was a number and an email if you had any questions, but other than that, it wasn't really like, this is me telling you how to understand it. It was just like, if you're confused, you can do this.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

### Reasons for engagement with contracts

Students in focus groups and interviews who had read contracts in some or full detail had usually done so to inform themselves of their own obligations under the terms of the contract, rather than what the obligations of their accommodation provider were. For example, they wanted to understand items they were allowed to have in the accommodation, like air fryers or candles, or rules they would have to follow. Several also said that they thought it was important to engage with any legal documents they were signing.

“I was just most interested in things like what the contract included, how much things were going to be. And again, like if there was any damage or anything like that, what would happen?”

#### Student in private accommodation (other rented)

“I guess because it was the first time that I was making like a really big decision in my life... So, I kind of wanted to make sure that I was very informed and [knew] what I was getting into.”

#### Student in private accommodation (student accommodation company)

Those who did not read their contract generally felt they were of low importance, justifying that because they were a routine part of student life they trusted they would be safe and secure in signing them.

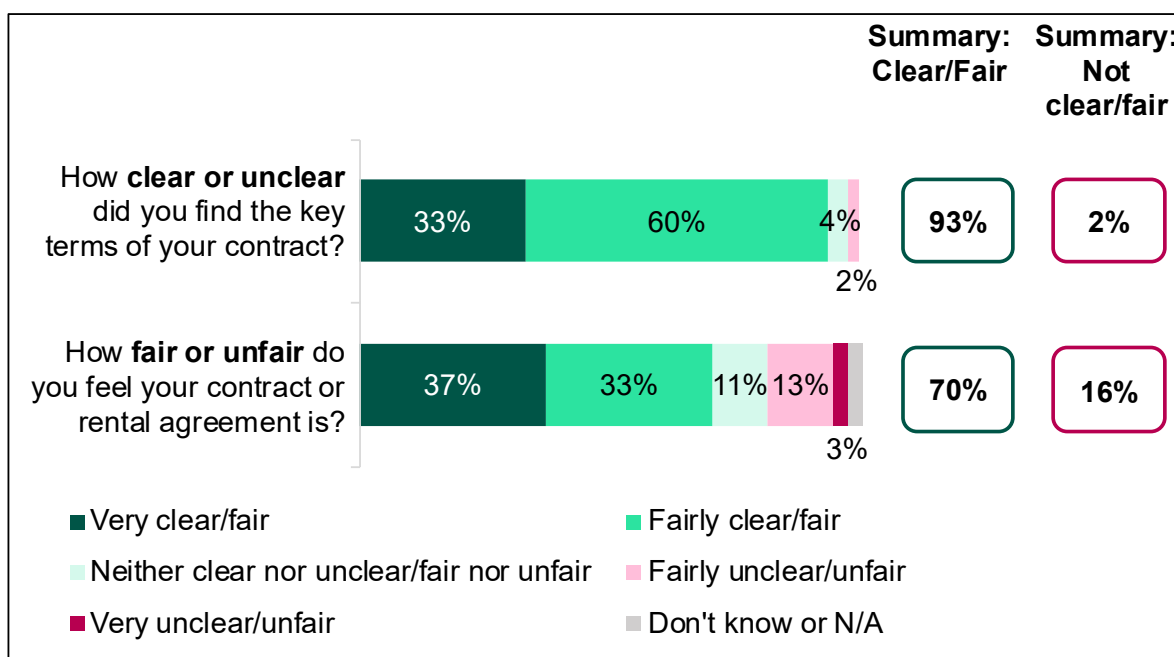
“I didn't think [reading the contract] was that important. I just thought, you know, like thousands of people do this every year. I don't think I'll be signing anything horrible away. So, I just signed it.”

#### Student in university or college-maintained accommodation

### Perceived clarity and fairness of contracts

Students were mostly positive about the clarity and fairness of their contract, as shown in Figure 4.1. Almost all surveyed students reported they found the key terms of their contract clear (93 per cent), including a third who found them very clear (33 per cent). Only a small minority (2 per cent) of students found the key terms unclear. A lower proportion of students, though still the majority, felt their contract was fair (70 per cent), including 37 per cent who found it very fair. However, a sizeable minority (16 per cent) of students did feel that their contract was unfair.

**Figure 4.1 How clear and how fair students found their contract or rental agreement**



B5. How clear or unclear did you find the key terms of your contract – such as rent, what is included in the rent, fees or charges, reporting issues, house rules, deposits, and how to end the contract? / B6. How fair or unfair do you feel your accommodation contract or rental agreement is? Base: All students who read their contract or tenancy agreement (1,241).

White students were most likely of any ethnic group to find their contract fair (76 per cent, compared to 62 per cent of non-white students), and black students were more likely than white students to find it unfair (23 per cent, compared to 13 per cent). Students with parental history of higher education were more likely to find terms fair (80 per cent) than those whose parents were not educated to degree level (63 per cent).

Additionally, students in the achieved sample who were living in accommodation maintained by their university or college were more likely to find their contract fair (75 per cent, compared to 70 per cent overall). Those living in private student accommodation were least likely to find the terms clear (87 per cent), and those in other private rented accommodation least likely to find the contract fair (61 per cent). However, those surveyed in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of their university or college were also less likely than average to find the terms fair (62 per cent), with around a quarter (23 per cent) finding them unfair.

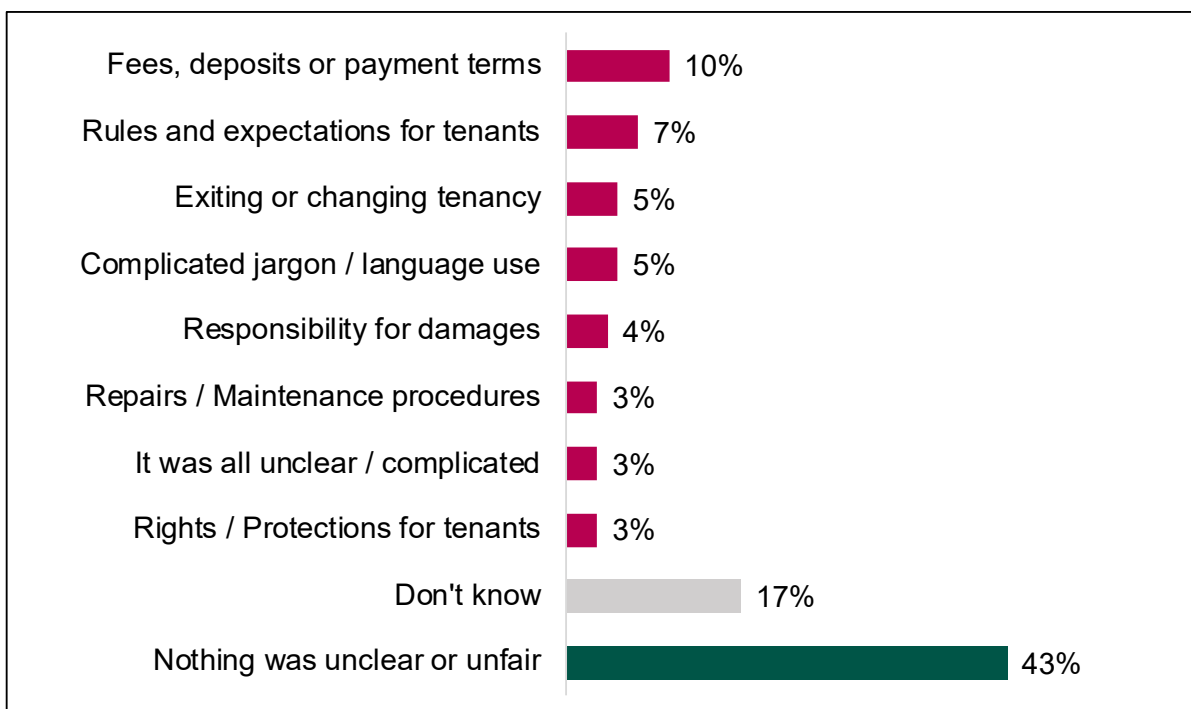
Expectedly, those who said they had read their contract in detail were more likely than those who had only skim-read it to find the contract both clear (95 per cent compared to 89 per cent) and fair (75 per cent compared to 61 per cent).

This was supported by findings from the focus groups and interviews where students who had read contracts in detail, often with support from others, appeared more confident naming specific terms of their contract. This included the details of deposit protection, services provided in their accommodation, and their own obligations as tenants.

Surveyed students were asked to consider specific areas of the contract that were difficult to understand, unclear or unfair in an open-text question, which was coded for analysis. Over two-in-five (43 per cent) felt that there was nothing which was unclear or unfair, as shown in Figure 4.2. However, one-in-ten students (10 per cent) felt that the fees, deposits and payment terms were

unclear or unfair. A small proportion of students (3 per cent) said that all of their contract was unclear or complicated.

**Figure 4.2. Specific areas of their contract that students found difficult to understand, unclear or unfair**



B8. Thinking about your contract / agreement overall, what specific areas if any did you find difficult to understand, unclear, or unfair? Base: All students who read their contract or tenancy agreement (1,241). Responses below 3 per cent not shown.

Students who had read their contract in detail were more likely than those who had skim-read it to raise the areas of rules / expectations for tenants (9 per cent compared to 5 per cent), and complicated jargon / language use (6 per cent compared to 3 per cent).

In focus groups and interviews, students who had engaged with their contracts on the whole felt they had understood key points around what they could expect from their provider and their own obligations. This was more so the case for those who had sought support to understand it. Prior to the focus groups and interviews, students were asked to (re-)read their contracts to identify areas of confusion, and several noted difficulty engaging with the contract due to the complexity of the language or the document length. For some, this created confusion which meant they struggled to read it in more detail. More specifically, students encountered challenges with highly legalistic or jargonistic terminology, and while one student acknowledged “it would be easy to look it up”, this still served as a barrier to understanding key sections and reduced motivation to try to understand it further.

“I've gone through all of it when I first read it and I just thought [...] when it's talking about agreements and like what possessions you can bring and what you can't and just like what you can and can't do and like the cleanliness... It really confused me [...] I don't think it's very clear and concise on what is actually fully allowed and not allowed.”

**Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

“I would expect it to be a lot simpler because, I mean, really when you're 18, you're only just gaining independence, aren't you. So, if you start in uni, you'd think they'd make it a bit simple for you because if everyone's confused, then it's not really working, is it?”

### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

Students highlighted a small number of specific areas that were unclear to them. These included what counted as chargeable damage, permitted appliances, deposit arrangements, and how to challenge the provider on meeting their own obligations. The lack of clarity usually stemmed from finding terms contradictory (e.g. some flammable items being prohibited and others allowed) or experiences of providers not upholding specific obligations, which caused uncertainty for students about whether the terms of the contract would be enforced. They also noted areas they found unrealistic or out-of-step with their actual experiences of student life, with examples including procedures for having guests, rules regarding the number of nights guests can stay, and inconsistently applied rules on chargeable damage. Students found it confusing that some terms of contracts would be enforced differently.

A couple of students noted that their understanding of their contractual obligations improved after arriving at the accommodation and starting their course. Some university or college accommodation services and private accommodation providers put on induction sessions, provided handbooks, or had information notices in buildings to inform students of their obligations and what they could expect, which helped students feel confident.

“I think our accommodation was good because we got a little student handbook, which, although it wasn't the official terms and conditions, it did summarise a lot of key elements of what you had to do as a student living in the accommodation [...] we also had a mandatory talk that went through your responsibilities and consequences if you do certain things like how long someone's allowed to stay, for example.”

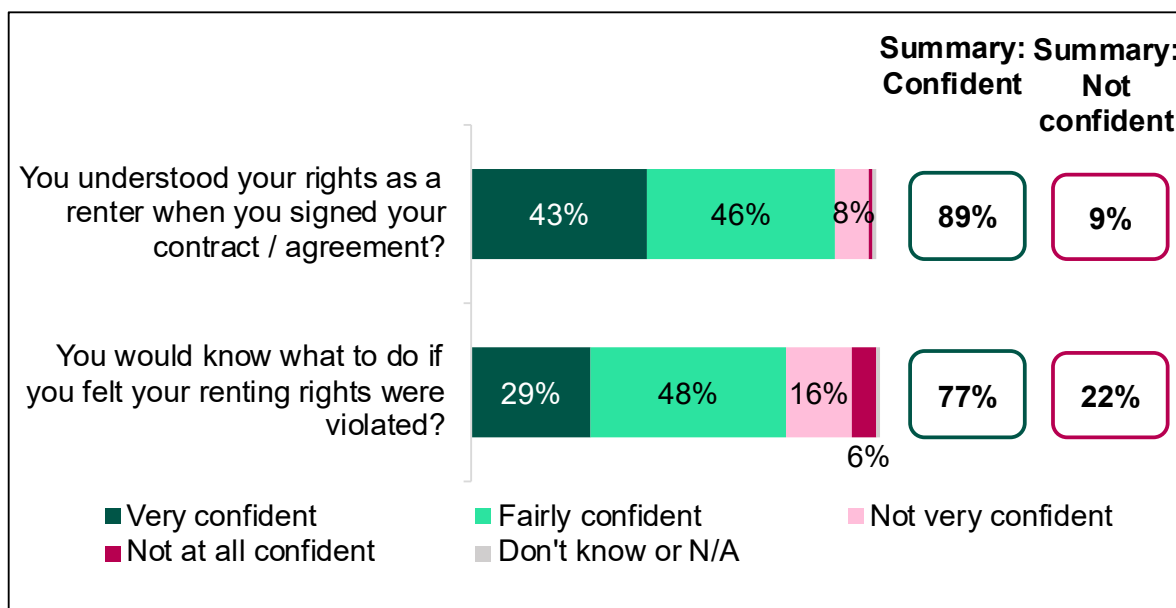
### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

This suggests that students may find it easiest to engage in the details of their contracts only after they have signed them, or that supporting material is not always available during the decision-making process to adequately inform prospective students.

## **Awareness of renting rights**

When surveyed, nine-in-ten students with a contract (89 per cent) felt confident that they understood their rights as a renter, including over four-in-ten (43 per cent) who felt very confident, as shown in Figure 4.3. On the other hand, one-in-ten were not confident (9 per cent). It was less common for students to report confidence that they would know what to do if those rights were violated (77 per cent). Over one-in five (22 per cent) did not feel confident that they would know what to do if their renting rights were violated, including a small proportion who felt not at all confident (6 per cent).

**Figure 4.3 Students' levels of confidence regarding their rental rights when asked "How confident are you that...?"**



B7. How confident are you that... You understood your rights as a renter when you signed your contract / agreement? ... You would know what to do if you felt your renting rights were violated?  
 Base: All students with a contract or agreement (1,281). Responses below 2 per cent not shown.

Students of mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds were less likely to feel confident understanding their rights when compared to the average (76 per cent compared to 89 per cent), as were those with a long-term health condition or disability in comparison to other students (86 per cent compared to 91 per cent). There were no significant differences by sex or ethnicity in how likely students were to feel overall confident they would know what to do if their rights were violated. International students were more likely to feel confident about what they would do if their rights were violated than domestic students (88 per cent compared to 75 per cent).

Surveyed students living in PBSA were similarly likely to feel they understood their rights when they signed their contract (90 per cent of those in both university or college-maintained accommodation or accommodation privately maintained on behalf of university or college, and 91 per cent of those in private student accommodation). However, those living in other private rented accommodation were less likely to feel confident with this (83 per cent). When it came to exercising their rights, those in university or college-maintained accommodation felt slightly more confident they would know what to do (79 per cent), while those in private student accommodation were least likely to feel confident (63 per cent).

These findings are consistent with what students reported in focus groups and interviews. In terms of their rights as renters, students expressed high confidence in awareness of their own rights and how to exercise them in the abstract. However, in practice, several had not exercised their rights when accommodation providers had not upheld their obligations in relation to property quality or safety. This perhaps reflects a disconnect between perceived knowledge of their contractual entitlements and their actual understanding of processes they should follow to enforce their rights.

Examples of students not exercising their rights included not challenging providers about damaged furnishings that they had expected to be fixed before moving in, having to cover the costs of replacing a vacuum cleaner which was broken on arrival, and not being provided with cleaning services their contract said their rent covered. Students did not always challenge accommodation providers in these

instances, or, where they did raise concerns initially, did not always persist, due to a lack of knowledge on how to do so, a general reluctance to create difficulties with their accommodation provider or landlord, or feeling that their issue was not serious enough to warrant escalation.

“Well, my flatmate did ask after the first month [about the cleaning service ...] we’ve just let it fizzle out [...] because the university have bigger issues to deal with, even though it’s a pretty big issue.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

Uncertainty about how to exercise their rights was more common among those in other privately rented accommodation, some of whom felt they had no recourse if their landlord did not uphold their obligations, and that as students they were vulnerable to malpractice. For example, several students noted issues with landlords who were very slow to respond to or totally unresponsive regarding problems with mould, ventilation and fire safety, but did not feel confident escalating such issues.

“I just feel like [the landlord] knew that we were young and they weren't too keen to sort things out as quick as they probably should have done [...] you don't know how to handle situations like that, because if it's not in the contract, you could ask the university, I suppose, but they could only do so much if it's privately rented.”

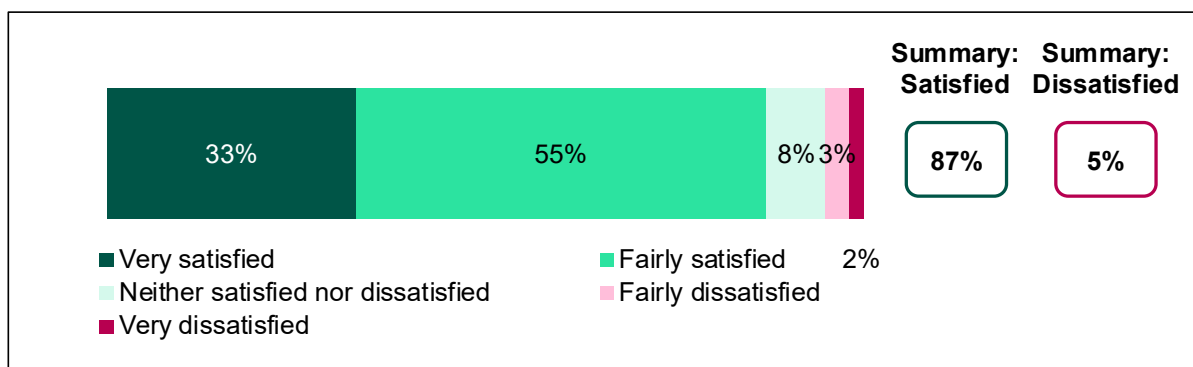
#### **Student in private accommodation (other rented)**

## 5 Satisfaction with accommodation and issues experienced

### Satisfaction with accommodation

A large majority of students were satisfied with their overall experience of their accommodation (87 per cent), with only a small proportion (5 per cent) being dissatisfied, as shown in Figure 5.1.

**Figure 5.1 Students' satisfaction with their overall accommodation experience**



D2. Thinking about this academic year so far, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your overall experience of your current accommodation? Base: All students (1,293).

There were some differences in overall satisfaction with experience by some student characteristics. For example, students with no long-term health condition or disability were more likely to be satisfied than students with such a condition or disability (88 per cent compared to 83 per cent). Satisfaction was also more likely among students with a parental history of higher education (91 per cent compared to 83 per cent with no parental higher education qualification).

As may be expected, students who felt positively about the value for money of their accommodation were more likely to be satisfied. Almost all students who rated their accommodation as good value for money were satisfied with their overall experience of their accommodation (95 per cent), compared to just half of students who rated their accommodation as poor value for money (51 per cent).

In focus groups and interviews, students' description of their overall accommodation experience often focused on the social aspects of their accommodation and their satisfaction with this. They mentioned that having comfortable, spacious shared spaces was important to them for meeting others and developing networks, and that having these spaces led to greater satisfaction. The shared spaces included kitchen and living room areas or social areas such as games rooms and gardens, and students noted the convenience of being able to socialise with friends without needing to travel beyond their flat or building.

“[In] the common room... we just watch football and play pool and just socialise there basically. So that's 20 of us just basically having fun.”

#### Student in university or college-maintained accommodation

Some students reported being particularly satisfied with their accommodation provider when they ran social events, which some students were pleasantly surprised by. These events included a van selling pancakes on pancake day, or free barbecues or pizza events.

“They run stuff for us, just randomly, like they'll post something like an email saying, oh yeah, we're doing a BBQ, we're giving away free slices of pizza.”

#### **Student in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of university or college**

As with the survey findings, in focus groups dissatisfaction with accommodation was linked to the perceived value for money of the accommodation. Where students were dissatisfied, this most commonly centred around issues in the accommodation or feeling that the accommodation was more expensive than it should have been. Although students often acknowledged that accommodation was generally expensive, a few reported being dissatisfied with the price when issues were not resolved. For example, one student felt that their leaky ceiling and broken door should have been fixed more promptly given the amount of money they were paying.

“For the past like three days, they've had a ‘caution wet’ sign because the ceiling's leaking and it's like, if I'm paying significant amounts of money and you can't fix a door, then it's like, what, where's it going basically.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

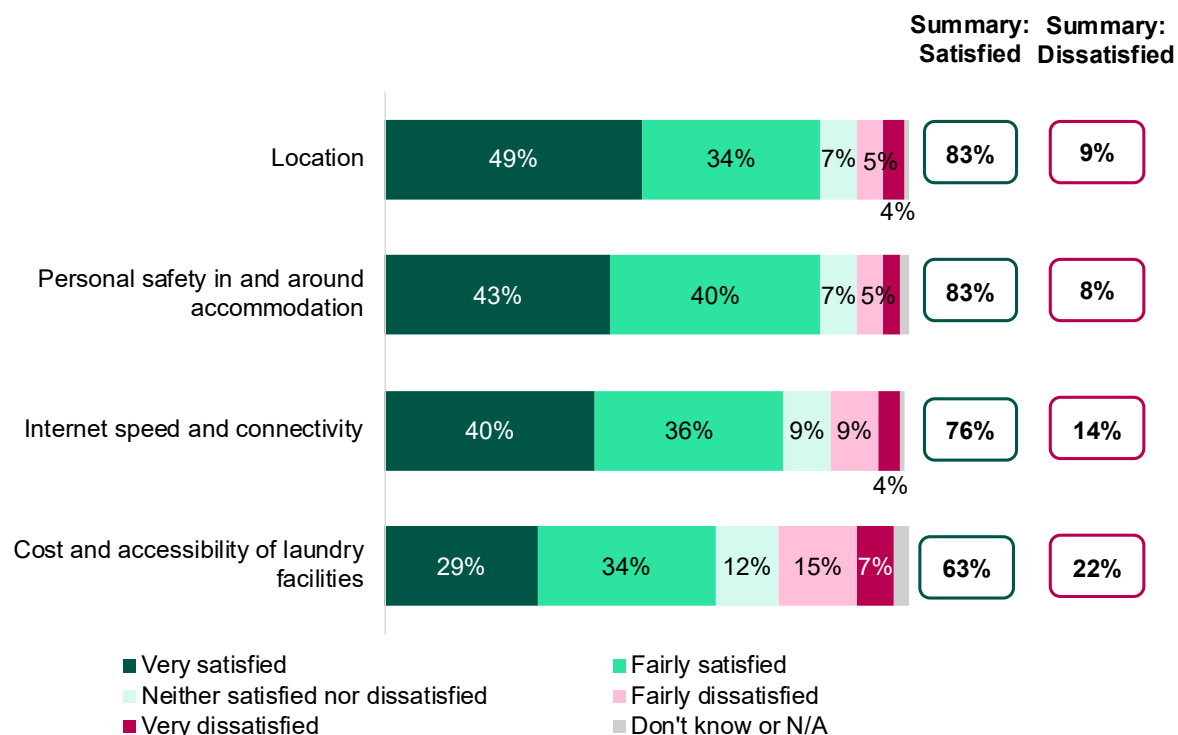
In focus groups and interviews, students described generally accepting minor issues as being typical of student housing. Therefore, these issues often did not substantially influence their overall satisfaction with their accommodation.

“I can't really think of anything off the top of my head that I'd want to be different. Like, I guess it's more just like... problem solving quicker, but like the actual accommodation building itself is fine.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

When asked to consider specific aspects of their accommodation, reported satisfaction was lower than it was for students' overall experience of their accommodation. That said, students were still generally satisfied with wider aspects of their accommodation, as shown in Figure 5.2. The majority of students were satisfied with the location (83 per cent) and personal safety in and around their accommodation (83 per cent), with less than one-in-ten students being dissatisfied (9 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively). Three-quarters of students were satisfied with the internet speed and connectivity (76 per cent), with 14 per cent being dissatisfied. However, less than two-thirds of students (63 per cent) were satisfied with the cost and accessibility of laundry facilities, with over one-in-five (22 per cent) dissatisfied.

**Figure 5.2 Students' satisfaction with aspects of their accommodation**



D4. And how satisfied are you with the following wider aspects of your current accommodation? Base: All students (1,293). Responses below 4 per cent not shown.

Surveyed students in university or college-maintained accommodation were more likely to be satisfied with the cost and accessibility of laundry facilities compared to those in private student accommodation (66 per cent compared to 45 per cent), the location (87 per cent compared to 75 per cent) and their personal safety in and around their accommodation (89 per cent compared to 73 per cent).

Students in focus groups living in university or college-maintained accommodation were positive about accommodation located in close proximity to campus or in a student area, as this supported their engagement with the academic and social aspects of university life. However, when it came to laundry facilities, students explained that while they knew that they would need to pay to use washing machines in their halls, costs were often not disclosed beforehand. Students were often surprised by the price of laundry facilities, including one student who assumed that the price was included in their accommodation costs. A few students reported spending £15 a week on one to two loads of laundry.

“I knew the washing wasn't included, I just didn't know that it would be £7 for a wash and dry [...] from what I can remember, I don't remember seeing anything about how much it was [when I was choosing my accommodation].”

**Student in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a provider**

**How students' accommodation experience compared to expectations**

When asked about whether the expectations they had for their accommodation before moving in had been met, a majority of students reported that it was better than expected (61 per cent). Three-in-ten

students (31 per cent) reported it was as expected, and the remainder said it was worse than expected (8 per cent).

Survey findings showed differences in whether expectations had been met by student characteristics. Some groups were more likely to have said their accommodation was better than expected, including: students with a parental history of higher education (73 per cent, compared to 53 per cent of those without); those living in university or college-maintained accommodation (64 per cent, compared to 52 per cent of those living in private student accommodation and 45 per cent of those in other private rented accommodation); and students who read their contract in detail (68 per cent, compared to 50 per cent of those who only partially read it).

On the other hand, students with a long-term health condition or disability were more likely to say their accommodation was worse than expected than those without such a condition or disability (14 per cent compared to 6 per cent), particularly those with a condition or disability that affects their accommodation requirements (17 per cent).

Qualitative findings indicated that students had sometimes heard about negative experiences of student accommodation (e.g. negative experiences with flatmates) and had modest expectations for their accommodation experience. Therefore, these students were pleased when they did not experience similar issues, or when there were minor issues, as they had been anticipating these anyway. Where accommodation expectations were exceeded, this was often due to extra facilities that they did not know about when choosing their accommodation, or facilities they had lower expectations for, such as a private tennis court or common rooms with various activities and facilities.

“Inside the room there's like a pool table, maybe it's a dart board and there's a tiny little cinema room as well. It's got some like bean bags that you can sit in like you can put movies on.”

### **Student in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a provider**

Students typically reported that the information they received from their accommodation before moving in was accurate, as shown in Table 5.1. Nine-in-ten students said they received accurate information on the proximity of the accommodation to campus (89 per cent) and the size of their bedroom (89 per cent). A lower proportion reported they had received accurate information on the quality of appliances (74 per cent), with almost one-in-five (19 per cent) saying they found information about this area to be inaccurate. Students more commonly reported receiving inaccurate information about the upkeep or cleanliness of shared spaces (15 per cent) and the proximity of the accommodation to local amenities (14 per cent). Despite reported levels of accuracy for different aspects of accommodation being relatively high overall, almost two-in-five students reported receiving inaccurate information for at least one aspect of their accommodation (39 per cent).

**Table 5.1 The accuracy of information received from the accommodation provider before moving in for different aspects of students' accommodation**

Aspects of accommodation	Yes	No
Proximity to campus	89%	6%
The size of my bedroom	89%	7%
Access to accommodation services (e.g. laundry facilities, gym)	85%	9%
The furnishings provided in my bedroom and shared spaces	85%	10%
Proximity to local amenities (e.g. shops, parks)	77%	14%
Upkeep or cleanliness of shared spaces and area around the accommodation	77%	15%
The quality of appliances (e.g. cooking appliances, fridge, TV)	74%	19%

C2. For the following aspects of your accommodation, was the information you received from your accommodation provider before moving in accurate? Base: All students who accessed information from a university or accommodation provider (1,133).

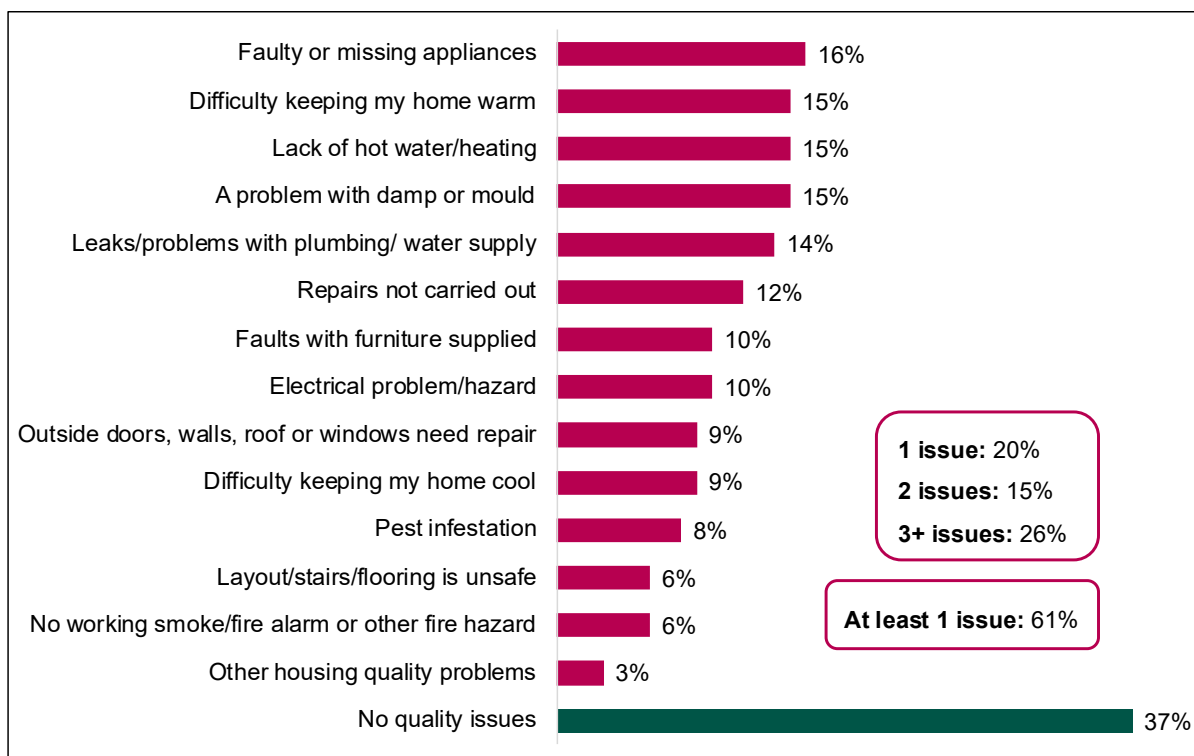
Responding to an open-text question, students who felt information about their accommodation was inaccurate cited the following reasons:

- **Quality of appliances:** appliances were poorer quality than described (33 per cent), lacked sufficient detail in descriptions (22 per cent), or had undisclosed faults (15 per cent)
- **Upkeep or cleanliness of shared spaces:** quality was poorer than described (38 per cent)
- **Bedroom size:** room measurements or sizes did not match descriptions (27 per cent)
- **Furnishings:** not all provided furnishings were listed in advance (30 per cent)
- **Proximity to campus:** distances were not as described (64 per cent)
- **Access to accommodation services:** information was not provided at all (25 per cent) or listed services were missing (20 per cent)
- **Proximity to local amenities:** information was not provided (36 per cent) or distances were inaccurate (26 per cent).

### Issues experienced with accommodation

Despite positive views overall about their accommodation, three-in-five students (61 per cent) had experienced at least one issue with the quality of their accommodation, with a quarter of students (26 per cent) experiencing three or more issues. However, over a third of students had experienced no issues (37 per cent) (Figure 5.3).

**Figure 5.3 Accommodation quality issues experienced by students since the start of this academic year**



D5. Since the start of this academic year (September / October 2025), which, if any, of the following accommodation quality issues have you experienced? Base: All students (1,293). Responses below 1 per cent not shown.

Students with a long-term health condition or disability were more likely to have experienced at least one quality issue with their accommodation (73 per cent), especially those with a condition or disability affecting accommodation requirements (80 per cent), compared to students with no long-term health condition or disability (58 per cent). This was also true of surveyed students in private student accommodation (75 per cent) compared to those in university or college-maintained accommodation (60 per cent).

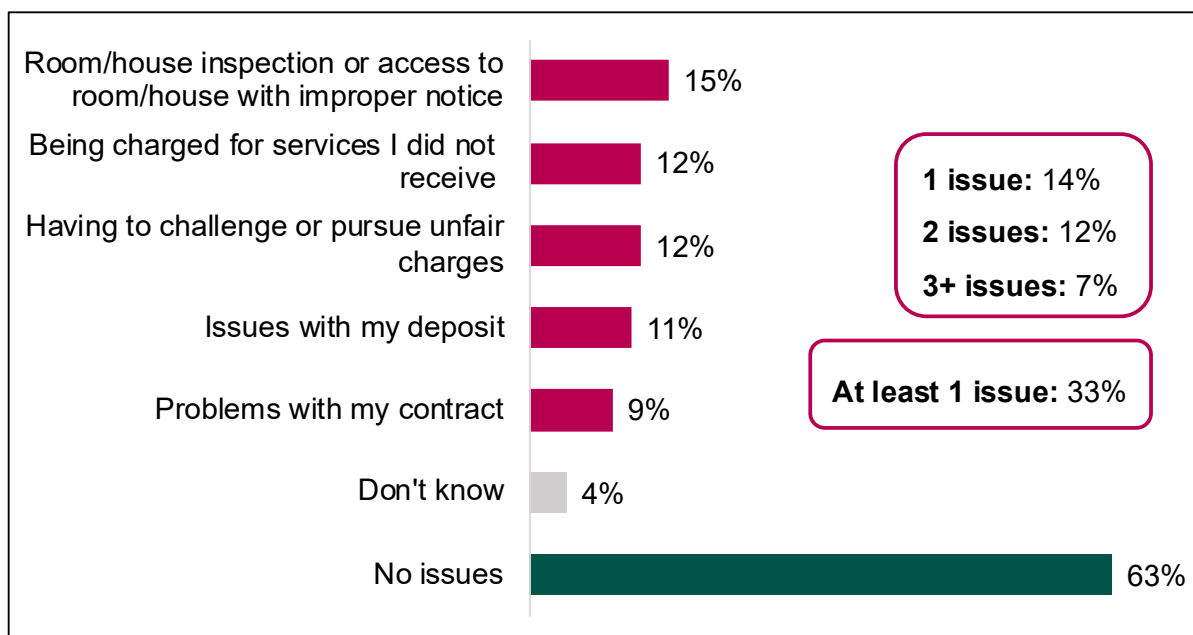
Students who took part in the focus groups and interviews encountered maintenance and facilities-related issues such as broken showers or taps, insect infestations, and mould and damp issues. However, in general, there was a sense that these issues were minor and bearable for the short term, and that they did not substantially impact their student experience, particularly if resolved quickly.

“I had a heater problem where it wasn't really working in my room, and I just went and spoke to the front desk about it, and they were really good about it.”

**Student in private accommodation (student accommodation company)**

As shown in Figure 5.4, issues surrounding costs, charges and room inspections were less commonly experienced than issues with the quality of the accommodation, with nearly two-thirds of students (63 per cent) saying they had experienced none of these issues. However, a third of students had experienced as least one of these issues (33 per cent), the most common being a room inspection without proper notice (15 per cent), followed by being charged for services they did not receive or having to challenge unfair charges (both 12 per cent).

**Figure 5.4 Issues surrounding costs, charges and room inspections experienced by students since the start of the academic year**



D6. Since the start of this academic year (September / October 2025), which, if any, of the following other issues have you experienced with your accommodation? Base: All students (1,293). Responses below 2 per cent not shown.

Similarly to quality issues, several of the issues shown in Figure 5.4 were more commonly reported among students with a long-term health condition or disability. Only half of these students (50 per cent) and 38 per cent of students with a condition or disability affecting accommodation requirements reported experiencing none of these issues, compared to two-thirds of students with no long-term health condition or disability (66 per cent).

Experiencing at least one of these issues was also more likely amongst students with a parental history of higher education (43 per cent) compared to those without (28 per cent).

A small number of students in focus groups and interviews raised issues surrounding costs, charges and room inspections. One student reported having £50 unfairly deducted from their deposit for a ‘dusty toilet’. A few students also mentioned how they were informed that cleaning services were included in the price of their accommodation, but in reality, they were not receiving these or the services were inadequate. Students acknowledged that they had a responsibility to keep areas clean but were dissatisfied if they were not provided with cleaning services that should have had included.

“The kitchen can be kind of like grim, I guess, which is kind of down to my flatmates as well. But I mean, if we’re paying for a cleaner, it kind of would be nice to actually have that service.”

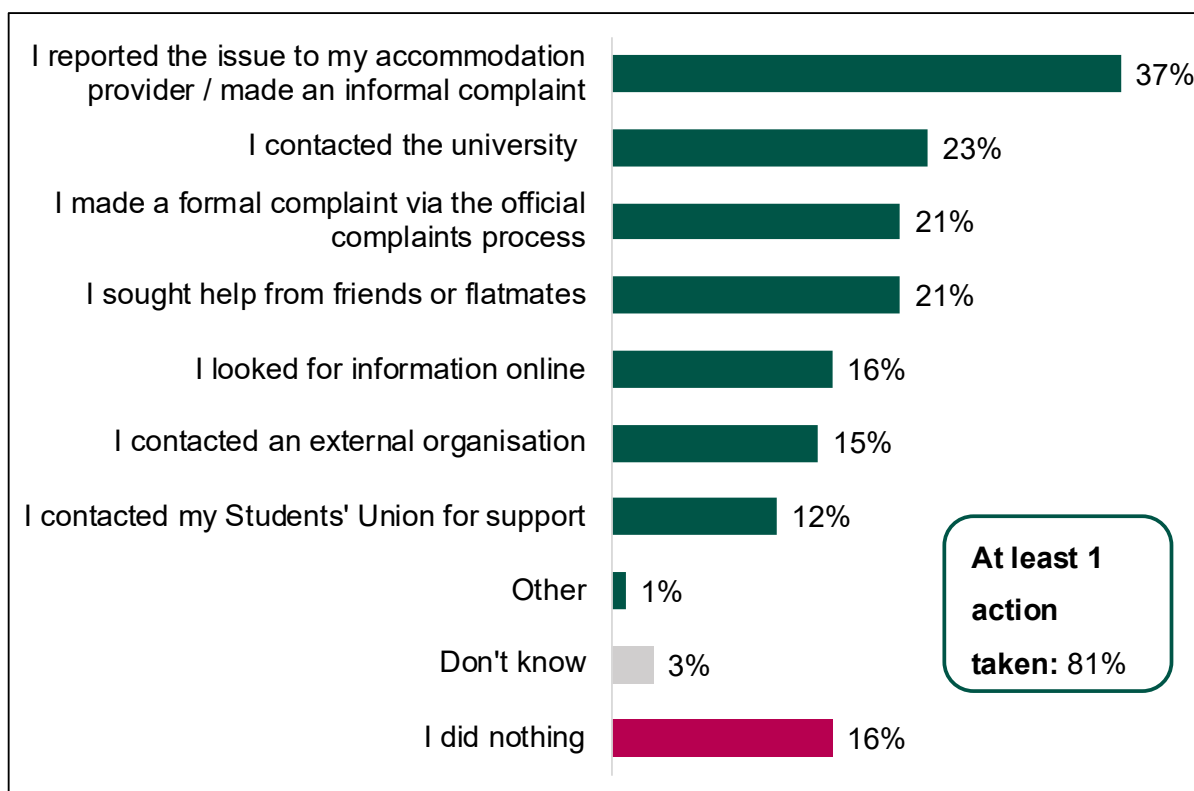
### Student in university or college-maintained accommodation

#### Actions taken to resolve issues with accommodation

Four-in-five students who experienced issues with their accommodation said they had taken action to resolve the issues (81 per cent), with 16 per cent saying they had done nothing (Figure 5.5). The most common action was reporting the issue directly to the accommodation provider (37 per cent),

followed by contacting a central university or college team such as an accommodation department or other student services (23 per cent), making a formal complaint or seeking help from friends of family (both 21 per cent).

**Figure 5.5 The actions taken by students to try resolve their accommodation issues**



D7. What did you do in order to try to resolve your issue? Base: All students who experienced issues with their accommodation (833).

Some groups of students were more likely to have taken at least one action to try and resolve their accommodation issue. This included students with a parental history of higher education (88 per cent) compared to those without such history (78 per cent) and aged 21 to 24 years (90 per cent compared to 81 per cent on average) who took at least one action. On the other hand, domestic students were more likely to have done nothing than international students (18 per cent compared to 8 per cent).

Students in focus groups and interviews most frequently contacted their accommodation provider’s maintenance team, or digital reporting systems, when issues had occurred. Where students did not take action or were aware of friends who did not, this was often thought to be due to past negative experiences of reporting issues or a history of them being unresolved. In these cases, some students felt like it was easier to deal with or just accept issues (e.g., mould) because they did not expect any action to be taken by their accommodation provider and therefore, did not think reporting issues was worth their time.

“Even if it’s just like a little thing, they just like, they take ages or they just don’t come at all, or it never gets mentioned again. So, no one brings it up.”

**Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

“I thought we’d hear [from the landlord] a bit more, he’d want to check that the house was in good condition, but we’ve not really heard of him. So, I just don’t think I’d even waste my breath next time.”

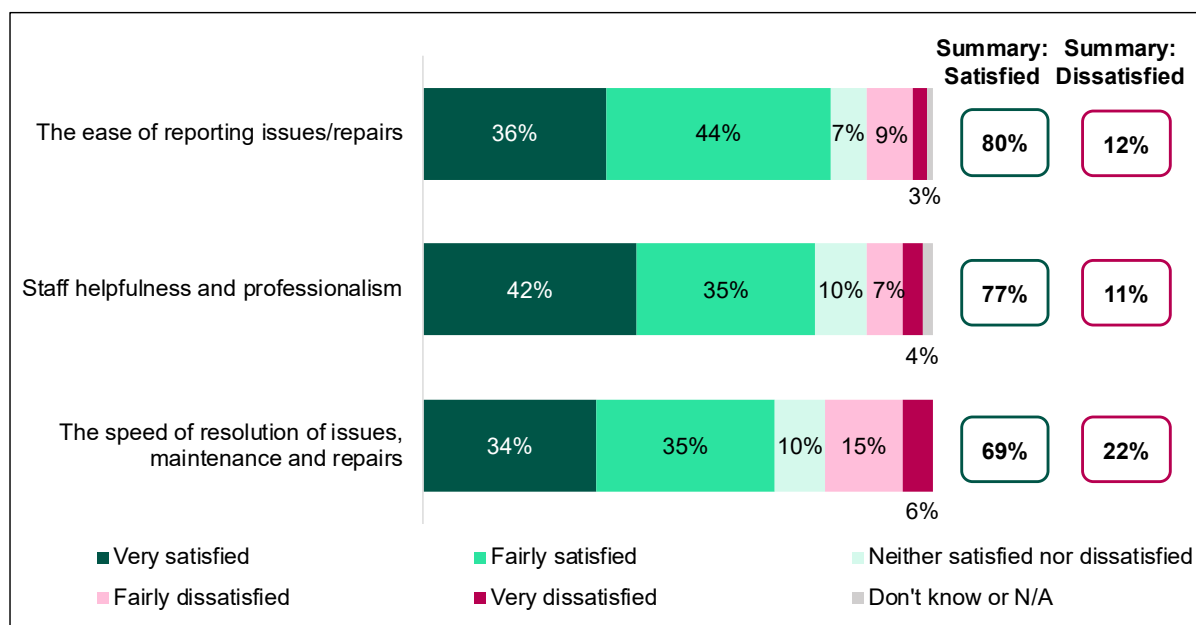
### Student in other private rented accommodation

#### Student views on accommodation providers’ approach to dealing with issues

Among students who had tried to resolve issues they experienced, less than half (43 per cent) said the issues had been resolved fully, though the large majority of students (86 per cent) said that they had been resolved at least partially. However, just under one-in-ten students said that their issues had not been resolved at all (8 per cent). Surveyed students in university or college-maintained accommodation were more likely to report their issue had been at least partially resolved compared to the average (89 per cent compared to 86 per cent).

Satisfaction was mostly high with accommodation providers’ approaches to dealing with issues or repairs, as shown in Figure 5.6. Around four-in-five students who made a formal or informal complaint were satisfied with the ease of reporting issues (80 per cent) and staff helpfulness (77 per cent), with around seven-in-ten (69 per cent) satisfied with the speed of issues being resolved.

**Figure 5.6 Students’ satisfaction with their accommodation provider’s approach to dealing with issues or repairs**



D9. Thinking about your accommodation provider’s approach to dealing with issues or repairs, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with...? Base: All who made an informal or formal complaint with their accommodation provider (433). Responses below 3 per cent not shown.

Students in the sample in university or college-maintained accommodation were more likely to be satisfied with each aspect compared the overall average. These students rated the ease of reporting issues (86 per cent compared to 80 per cent on average), staff helpfulness and professionalism (83 per cent compared to 77 per cent on average) and the speed of resolution of issues (76 per cent compared to 69 per cent overall), all higher than other students.

Qualitative findings suggested a slightly more mixed picture of students' experiences of having their issues resolved and the ease and speed of doing so. Although quantitative findings showed no significant difference between those in provider-maintained and private-maintained accommodation, in focus groups and interviews, students in private student halls tended to have the most positive experience. These students often described issues being resolved efficiently, often having well functioning and accessible reporting systems such as apps or maintenance portals and a responsive maintenance team.

“I would say I was quite surprised how much the support is available. For example, like, we've got reception, they're open 24/7... even if I'm locked out of four in the morning, they can sort me out.”

#### **Student in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a provider**

“You can report problems on the app really easily and it tells you if it's been reviewed and if it's been done while you've been away and out of the flat.”

#### **Student in private-maintained accommodation**

Whilst some students in university or college-maintained accommodation did have positive experiences of issues being resolved, a few students reported slower response times than they would have liked or expected. These students described having to deal with the issue themselves in the meantime or resigning themselves to the fact that the issue would not be resolved. For example, one student described how they had frequently reported their silverfish infestation to the maintenance team, but that it took them weeks to attempt to resolve the issue. This frustration was mirrored by another student who frequently contacted maintenance about a blocked sink and resorted to paying for a temporary fix that they were not compensated for.

“When I first moved in, my kitchen sink was blocked and leaked all the time, and we had to keep asking maintenance to help us. And then we ended up buying our own drain un-blocker, and then the maintenance guy used our drain un-blocker instead of something that was in the building.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

More significant issues arose in the private rental sector. Here, students renting from private landlords or through a letting agency reported having more protracted experiences, with issues going unresolved and landlords being unresponsive when issues were raised. These students reported how issues such as mould were ignored by their landlord, or that the landlord did not want to pay for the professional services that were needed. They often felt helpless to challenge their landlords when their complaints were repeatedly ignored, or did not know how to, with none of these students reporting escalating the issues beyond their landlord.

“She had some mould in her room, and it was getting quite bad quite quickly over winter. And the landlord just didn't seem in any rush and...we didn't know what to do.”

#### **Student in other private rented accommodation**

“I think it’s because he thinks that he’s quite a practical person and he tries to do it himself and he obviously just needs to get someone professional in. But yeah, it always takes a while as well and he just can’t, he’s just not very good at fixing stuff.”

#### Student in other private rented accommodation

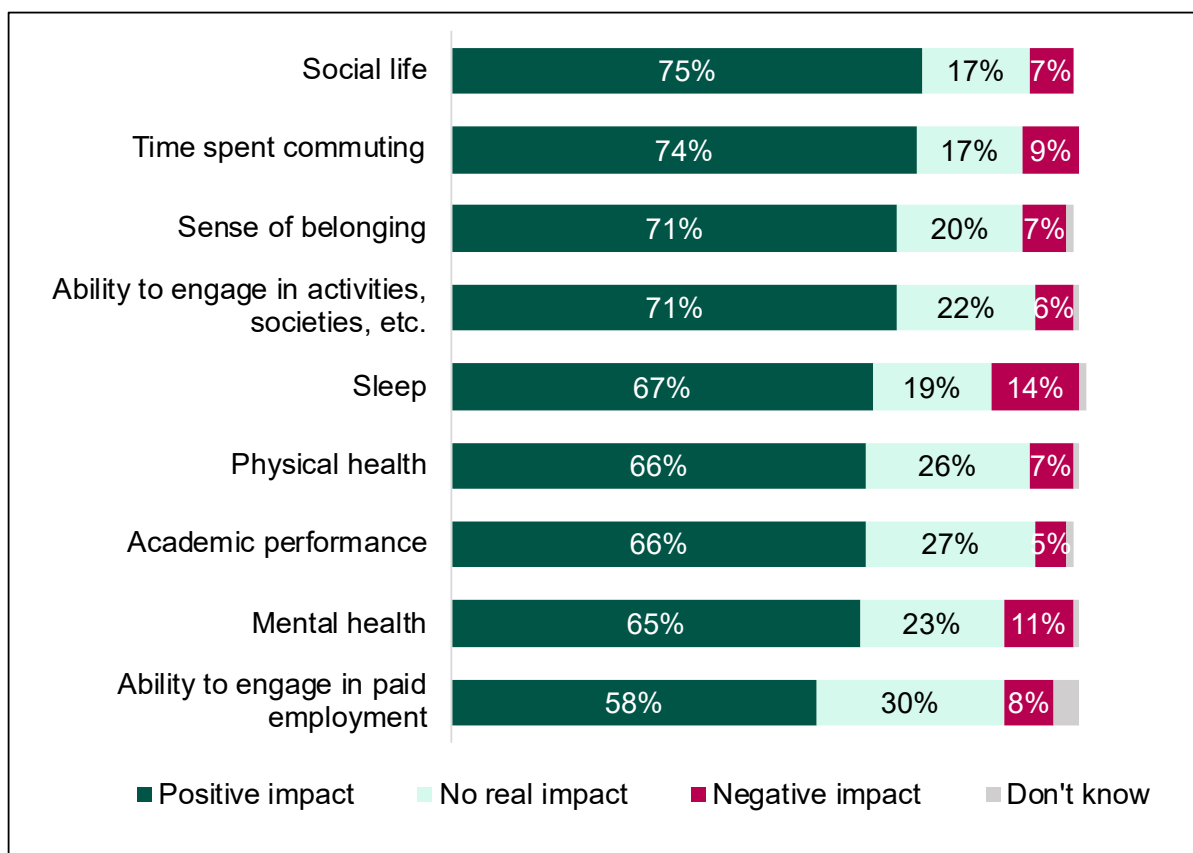
### Impact of accommodation on students’ lives

Most students (79 per cent) said that their accommodation had a positive impact on their student experience overall, with only a small minority (5 per cent) saying it had a negative impact. Groups of students more likely to say their accommodation had a positive impact included: students without a long-term health condition or disability (81 per cent) compared with those with such a condition or disability (72 per cent); students with a parental history of higher education (87 per cent) compared with those without (73 per cent); and international students (86 per cent) compared with domestic students (78 per cent). There were also differences in the achieved sample by accommodation type, with students in university or college-maintained accommodation (83 per cent) more likely to say it had a positive impact than those in private student accommodation (77 per cent).

In terms of specific aspects of their student life, students were most positive about the impact their accommodation had on their social life (75 per cent) and the time spent commuting (74 per cent), as shown in Figure 5.7. Students were less positive about the impact their accommodation had on their academic performance (66 per cent) with over a quarter (27 per cent) saying it had no real impact.

Despite only a small minority (5 per cent) of students saying their accommodation had a negative impact on their student experience overall, higher proportions reported a negative impact on specific aspects of their lives. For example, over one-in-ten students reported a negative impact on their sleep (14 per cent) or on their mental health (11 per cent).

**Figure 5.7 The impact of the accommodation experience on aspects of student life**



G2. And what impact, if any, has your accommodation experience had on the following aspects of your life as a student? Base: All students (1,293). Responses below 5 per cent not shown.

Surveyed students living in university or college-maintained accommodation were more likely to feel their accommodation had had a positive impact on their academic performance (71 per cent) than those in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a university or college (54 per cent), private student accommodation (49 per cent) or the private rented sector (58 per cent).

Disabled students were more likely to report experiencing negative impacts on their sleep or mental health. Nearly one-in-five (18 per cent) students with a long-term health condition or disability reported a negative impact on their sleep, compared to one-in-ten of those without such a condition (11 per cent). Similar proportions reported a negative impact on their mental health (19 per cent, compared to 9 per cent of those without a long-term health condition or disability).

A few students who took part in the qualitative research did raise the impact of living in busy and loud university halls on their sleep. They felt that this was partially due to location, as they recognised that living in a student area means living in an area that may be louder during the night. However, they felt that poor noise insulation was also partially responsible. Whilst a close proximity to campus was a positive for many students' accommodation experiences, for those who were often disrupted by noise, this had a more negative impact.

“You could hear someone like moving their chair around on the floor above. So, it’s really poorly insulated, but also just full of first year students in the sort of party accommodation basically.”

**Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

“Because it’s a very crowded area and it was right on campus, I just, I didn’t really sleep well. I couldn’t really focus well.”

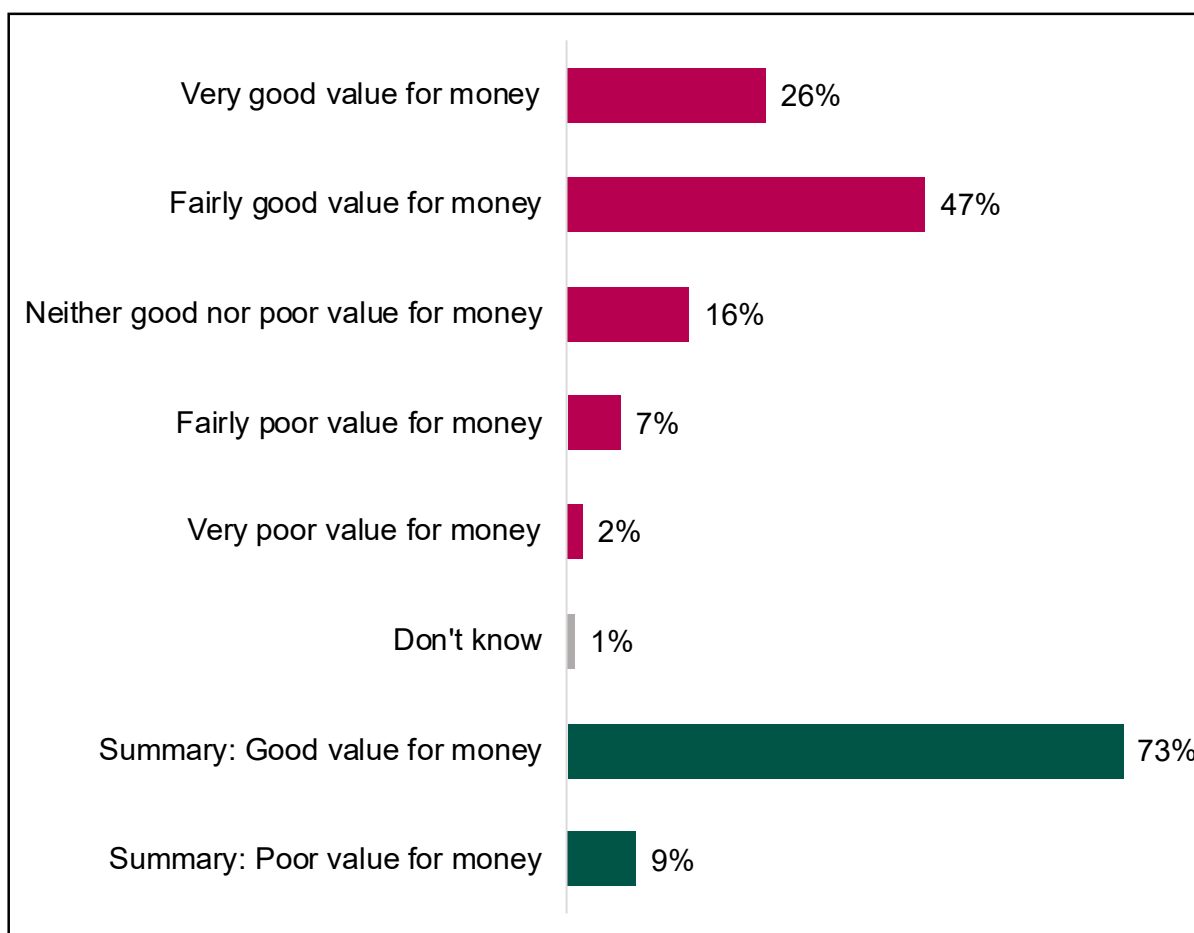
**Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

## 6 Perceived value for money

### Rating of value for money

Most surveyed students were generally positive about the costs of their accommodation, with nearly three-in-four (73 per cent) reporting that their accommodation was good value for money, including 26 per cent who reported it was very good value for money. Conversely, one-in-ten students (9 per cent) felt that their accommodation was poor value for money (Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1 Overall, ratings of value for money**



F1. Overall, how would you rate the value for money of your accommodation? Base: all who pay accommodation costs (1,278).

There were some notable differences in likelihood of seeing accommodation as offering good value for money by student characteristics, including:

- Male students compared to female students (79 per cent compared to 69 per cent);
- Black students compared to other ethnic minority students (80 per cent compared to 64 per cent of those from mixed or multiple ethnic groups and 71 per cent of those who are Asian or Asian British);
- Students without a long-term health condition or disability compared to disabled students (76 per cent compared with 65 per cent);

- Students with a parental history of higher education (85 per cent), compared to students whose parents were not educated to degree level (68 per cent); and
- Students in London were more likely than average to report their accommodation was good value for money (78 per cent), although students in the East of England were more likely than all other regions to report this (93 per cent). Students in the South West (65 per cent), North West (60 per cent), and the West Midlands (54 per cent) were less likely than those in other regions to report their accommodation was good value for money.

In focus groups and interviews, students who felt their accommodation was good value for money mostly attributed this to the size of their room and its condition, amenities being available on site, buildings that were modern and kept clean, good proximity to both local amenities and campus, and quick maintenance and repairs.

“It’s a little bit more expensive than what I’ve previously paid, but it has everything in the kitchen and it’s recently built. So, it’s very clean and not really that lived in. Like it’s quite modern. So, I feel like it’s more worth the extra money for that sort of thing.”

#### **Student in private accommodation (other rented)**

Conversely, issues that students reported negatively impacting perceived value for money included slow or poor response to maintenance issues, amenities including laundry not being included in rent, room size and poor noise insulation.

“I thought the laundry prices were included, but they weren’t. So that was just surprising to me.”

#### **Student in university or college-maintained accommodation**

The choices some students made about cheaper or more expensive accommodation were influenced by perceptions surrounding value for money, with some students feeling comfortable paying extra for room size or ensuite facilities, if they felt it was worth the extra cost, whereas others were content with more basic but functional accommodations, seeing this as better value.

“The size of my room, personally, I feel like it’s a little bit smaller. [...] But some other accommodations do have bigger rooms. But like you do pay a lot extra just for like a couple of metres of extra full space.”

#### **Student in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a provider**

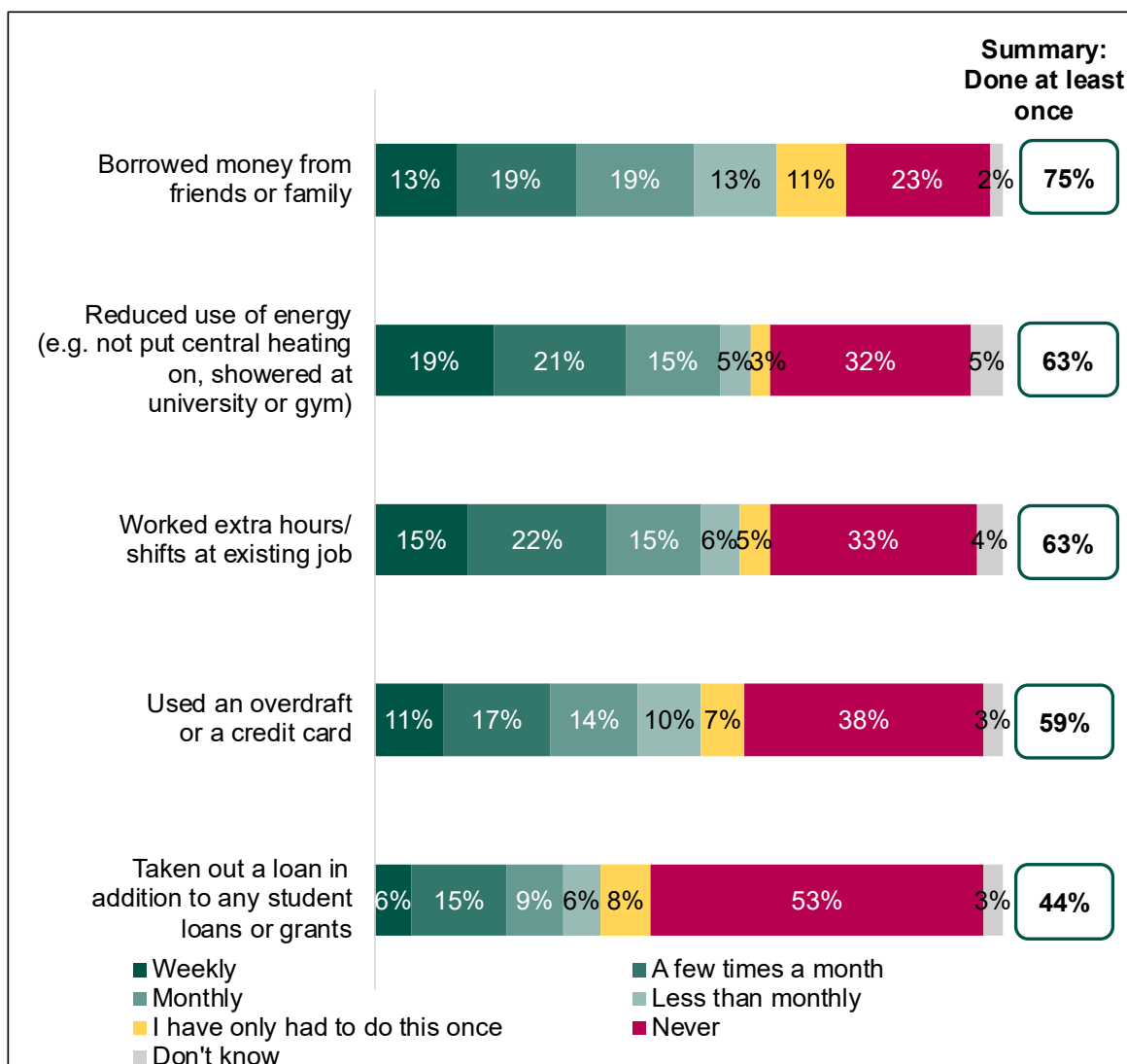
Some students came to conclusions about value for money based on comparisons to their accommodation with friends’ or other options in the local area, particularly based on a mix of price of rent, location, and amenities available.

### **Steps taken to cover the cost of accommodation**

A large majority (89 per cent) of students had taken at least one step in order to cover the costs of their accommodation at least once during their first year. Four-in-five (79 per cent) had taken at least one step on a monthly basis or more often. As shown in Figure 6.2, the most common steps taken were to borrow money from family or friends (75 per cent had done this at least once), reduce the energy they used (63 per cent), or work extra hours or shifts at a part-time job (also 63 per cent).

In line with this, these three steps that students took to help cover accommodation costs were the most common steps taken weekly, a few times a month or monthly (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.2 Steps taken to cover accommodation costs



E4. Thinking specifically about paying your accommodation costs, how often, if at all, have you had to take any of the following steps to help you cover these costs since you started your course last year?  
 Base: All students (1,293)

Some students elaborated in focus groups and interviews that they had expected to have to take additional steps to cover costs because existing funding did not stretch far enough. For example, several were supported through funds from parents, or part-time or summer jobs.

“[I will go home over the summer because] I have to work ... my maintenance loan isn't very good because my mum and dad are together and they've got a stable income, but not anything extra really. So, I think I got 4,900 pounds for the year and my rent comes to 7,040, so it doesn't really cover that much at all.”

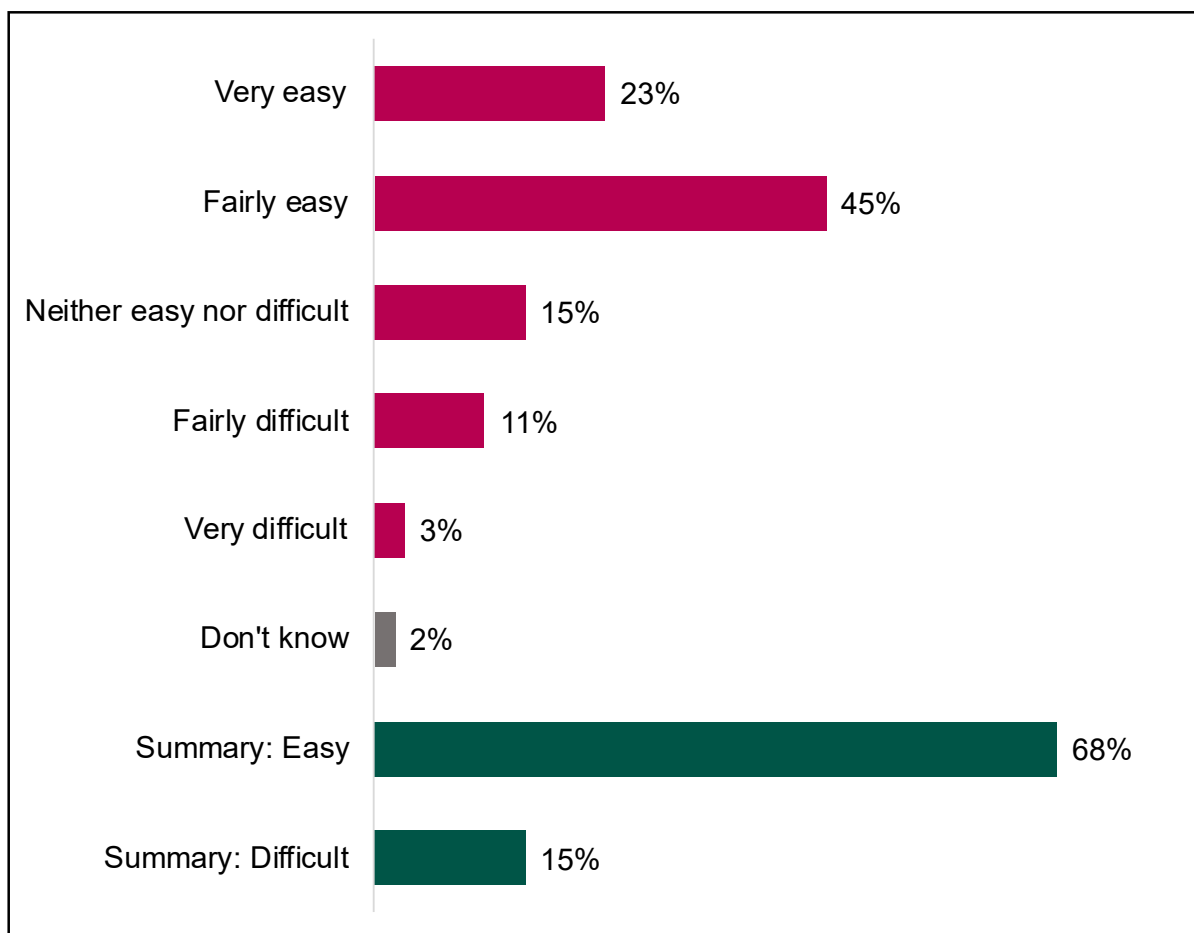
**Student in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a provider**

**Ease of covering accommodation costs**

Despite a high proportion of students having taken additional measures to cover their accommodation costs, around two-thirds students surveyed (68 per cent) reported that it was easy to cover the costs

of their accommodation, including almost a quarter (23 per cent) who reported that it was very easy. A significant minority (15 per cent) reported that it was difficult (Figure 6.3).

**Figure 6.3 Views on the ease of covering accommodation costs**



E3. How easy or difficult have you found it to cover the costs of your current accommodation? Base: All students (1,293).<sup>8</sup>

As expected, views on ease of covering costs of accommodation varied by socio-demographic characteristics. Students whose parents were educated to degree level were more likely to report ease in covering accommodation costs (79 per cent compared to 58 per cent of students without parental history of higher education); they were also less likely to find it difficult to cover these costs (8 per cent compared to 23 per cent of those without this parental history). Additionally, students without a disability or long-term health condition more commonly found it easy to cover their accommodation costs than disabled students (70 per cent compared to 61 per cent), as did international students (77 per cent) compared to domestic students (67 per cent).

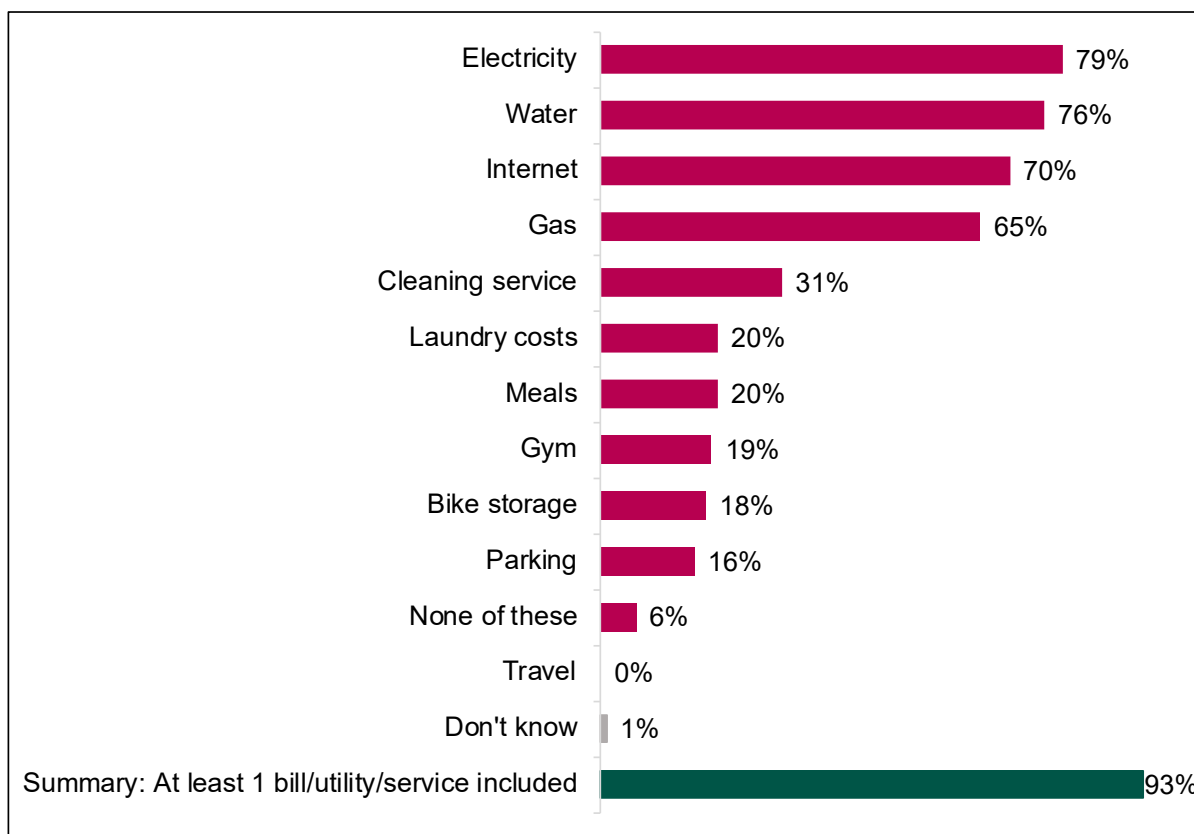
### Bills, utilities and services included in rent

Most students surveyed (93 per cent) had at least one bill, utility or service included in their rent. Bills and utilities were the most common (Figure 6.4); 79 per cent had electricity included, followed by

<sup>8</sup> The survey did not determine how students paid for accommodation i.e. whether they paid themselves using loans or grants, or had support from family.

water (76 per cent), internet (70 per cent), and gas (65 per cent). A minority had other services included, like cleaning services (31 per cent) or laundry costs (20 per cent).

**Figure 6.4 Bills, utilities and services reported to be included in rent**



E2. Which, if any, of the following bills, utilities or services are included in your rent? Base: All students (1,293)

### Choice of accommodation

Over three-quarters (79 per cent) of students surveyed reported they would be likely to choose the same accommodation again. Under one-in-five (18 per cent) of all students reported they would be unlikely to choose the same accommodation again.

Students who reported a greater likelihood of choosing the same accommodation again tended to share certain characteristics. Those with a parental history of higher education were more likely to say they would make the same choice (88 per cent), compared with students without such a history (72 per cent). Likelihood also varied by region: students living in London were more likely than average to say they would make the same choice (84 per cent), with the highest levels observed in the East of England (94 per cent), while lower levels were reported in the North West (58 per cent) and West Midlands (69 per cent). Surveyed students living in university or college-maintained accommodation were also more likely than average to say they would choose the same accommodation again (83 per cent, compared with 79 per cent overall).

In interviews, students who indicated they would choose the same accommodation again, or had already opted to remain in their current accommodation, sometimes cited lower prices and discounts for returning tenants as key reasons for their decision. Additionally, proximity to campus was mentioned as an important factor in their choice.

“I've just renewed the contract for the place that I'm staying in. It's really close to my uni building, so I feel like for convenience, it just made sense to live there still.”

**Student in accommodation privately maintained on behalf of a provider**

Conversely, students who said they would not choose the same accommodation again referenced a lack of amenities compared to other options, as well as social factors such as having fewer flatmates and not feeling they were able to experience the full “uni experience”.

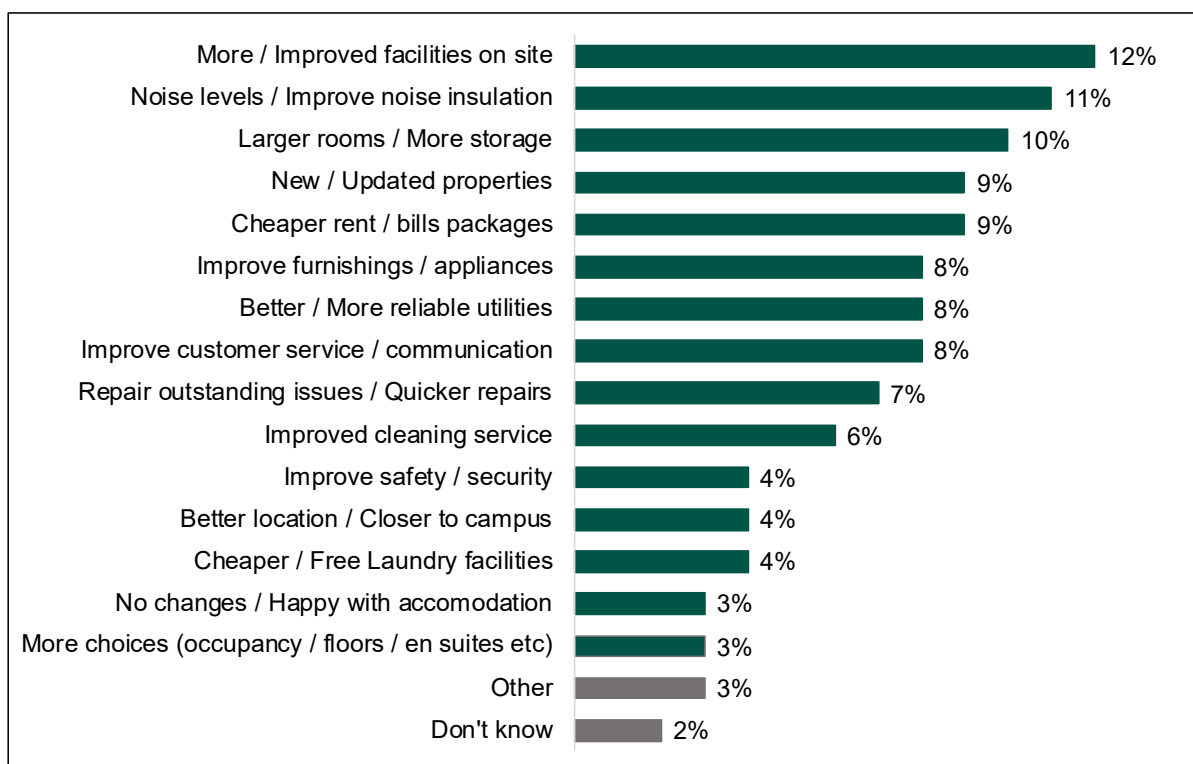
“I think the only reason that I wouldn't choose this one is just because I only have two flatmates. That's the only thing that it just didn't feel like a normal uni experience for me.”

**Student in private-maintained accommodation**

**What students would change about their accommodation**

Students surveyed were asked a free-text question about what change they would like to see in their accommodation. The data presented here is based on all those students who provided an answer (66 per cent). The most common change students surveyed would make to their accommodation was more / improved facilities on site (12 per cent), followed by reduced noise levels or improved noise insulation (11 per cent) and larger rooms (10 per cent) (Figure 6.5).

**Figure 6.5 Desired changes to accommodation**



H1. If you could make one change to your accommodation, what would this be? Base: All students except those answering ‘Prefer not to say’ (894).

## 7 Conclusion

This report shows that overall, most students report fairly positive accommodation experiences, while also highlighting areas that students feel less positively about, and types of student who experience student accommodation and related issues differently. These conclusions summarise the key findings relating to each of the four research objectives.

### Issues students face in accommodation and impacts on academic experience and wider student life

Overall satisfaction with accommodation was high, and most students felt their accommodation had a positive impact on their wider student experience, particularly their social life, commuting time and sense of belonging. However, issues were common, with a majority of students having experienced at least one accommodation quality issue, most often relating to repairs, facilities or cleanliness. Many students viewed issues as a part of 'normal' student living when resolved quickly and therefore not detrimental to their student experience. That said, a notable minority reported negative impacts on sleep and mental health, indicating that poor conditions or management can undermine wellbeing and, for some, their ability to study effectively.

### Contract compliance with consumer rights and students' ability to understand and exercise their rights

Students generally reported that contracts were clear, and most said they had read their contract at least in part. Nevertheless, the research indicates gaps in practical understanding. Many students relied on parents or other trusted individuals to interpret terms, suggesting students may overstate their own engagement with and understanding of contracts. For those who did engage, issues around length of contract documents and legalistic language proved a barrier to engagement and understanding. The research also identified uncertainty about who students' accommodation contract was with, including confusion between whether this was with the university or college or with a private company. Finally, fewer students felt confident about what to do if their rights were breached than felt confident about their rights in principle, with readiness amongst some students to pursue redress or escalation when problems arise apparently limited.

### Influence of provider information and commitments on higher education choices

Accommodation costs were an important consideration in higher education decision-making: most students said expected costs had an influence where they chose to study, though qualitative findings suggest costs were usually weighed alongside course, reputation and location. University and college accommodation services and provider websites were the most commonly used routes and sources of information, supplemented by informal channels such as friends, family and student-generated content on social media. While most students felt pre-arrival information was accurate, a substantial minority reported inaccuracies for at least one aspect of their accommodation, reinforcing the importance of clear, comprehensive and comparable information when students are making high-stakes choices.

### Value for money and whether students would choose the same accommodation again

Most students rated their accommodation as good value for money and said they would choose the same accommodation again, within the context of their first year experience. Perceived value was

closely linked to accommodation quality, the transparency of what was included in rent and how effectively issues were resolved. Where students reported poor value, this was typically associated with unresolved maintenance problems, unexpected or unclear additional charges and dissatisfaction with particular facilities (notably laundry).

A large majority of students reported taking steps to help cover their accommodation costs (such as borrowing money from family or friends, reducing energy use, or working additional hours), indicating that meeting accommodation costs often involved responding to affordability pressures even where perceptions of value were mostly positive. Alongside this, most students reported finding it easy to cover accommodation costs, while a meaningful minority reported finding it difficult.

Across the research, patterns of differences associated with accommodation type within the survey sample and students' characteristics indicate uneven experiences, including access to choice, support and effective routes to resolve problems. The results highlight the importance of transparent information on costs and services, accessible support to understand contracts and rights, and timely, reliable management of accommodation issues to protect students' wellbeing and enable full participation in academic and student life.

## 8 Annexes

### Annex A: Respondent and participant profile

This annex displays the breakdown of the achieved survey sample by key socio-demographic characteristics.

**Table 8.1 Profile of survey respondents (unweighted)**

Grouping	Sub-classification	No. of participants	%
<b>Sex</b>	Female	759	58.7%
	Male	524	40.5%
	Prefer not to say	10	0.8%
<b>Age group</b>	20 and under	905	70%
	21-24	213	16.5%
	25-29	120	9.3%
	30 and over	49	3.8%
	Prefer not to say	6	0.5%
<b>Known disability or long-term health condition</b>	Yes	235	18.2%
	No	1,027	79.4%
	Don't know / Prefer not to say	31	2.4%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	799	61.8%
	Mixed / multiple ethnic groups	69	5.3%
	Asian or Asian British	219	16.9%
	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	183	14.2%
	Other ethnic group	14	1.1%
	Prefer not to say	9	0.7%
<b>Socio-economic indicator – parents with higher education qualification or equivalent</b>	Yes	914	70.7%
	No	345	26.7%
	Don't know	21	1.6%
	Prefer not to say	13	1%
<b>Domestic / international</b>	Domestic	1025	79.3%
	International	256	19.8%
	Don't know / Prefer not to say	12	0.9%
<b>Total</b>		1,293	100%

Table 8.2 Profile of focus group and interview participants

Grouping	Sub-classification	No. of participants
Accommodation type	University or college-maintained accommodation	7
	Private-maintained on behalf of university or college	4
	Private accommodation	10
Sex	Female	11
	Male	10
Domestic / international	Domestic	17
	International	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>21</b>

### Annex B: Weighting approach

As noted in the Methodology section of this report, Random Iterative Method (RIM) weighting was applied to the survey data to account for variance in sex and parental history of higher education between the achieved survey sample and the population data.

The achieved survey sample was in line with the population for other socio-demographic variables, so these were not corrected for with weighting. The exception to this was age, where the achieved sample was skewed towards younger age groups versus the population. This is consistent with the exclusion of owner-occupiers from the sampling frame, who are known to have an older age profile than renters. Age was therefore excluded from weighting, as this would require calibration to population benchmarks that include deliberately out of scope groups. Weighting also did not include respondents' reported accommodation type variable. This is due to uncertainty around the accuracy of population figures for accommodation type.

The data was weighted to align with the following population proportions.

Table 8.3 Weighting by sex

Sex	Population proportion	Survey proportion
Female	54%	59%
Male	46%	41%
Unknown	0%	1%

Table 8.4 Weighting by parental education

Parental history of higher education	Population proportion	Survey proportion
Yes	46%	71%
No	42%	27%
Unknown	12%	3%

“

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Whether employer or employee, client or collaborator, we are all humans first and foremost. Recognising this essential humanity is central to how we conduct our business, and how we lead our lives. We respect and accommodate each individual's way of thinking, working and communicating, mindful of the fact that each has their own story and means of telling it.

### 2. Impartiality and independence:

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