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Students' Association (ANUSA)

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The Australian National University Students Association (ANUSA) is the peak representative body for the undergraduate students of the ANU. ANUSA is made up of 40 student committee members and every undergraduate student is a member of the Association. [ANUSA](#) represents about 9,000 undergraduate students. ANUSA assists students in many areas including advocacy, welfare support and organizing social events. ANUSA also provides free legal and welfare services.

The majority of students at ANU are from interstate or overseas and require housing when moving to ANU. Many students face problems with finding housing, and if they are lucky enough to secure housing, many students struggle with the affordability of the Canberra housing market. We regularly advocate for students' accommodation needs in the ACT and broader Canberra community.

We commend the ACT Government for undertaking this review as it is an important step to ensure that students, a strong component of the ACT population, are living in safe, affordable and accessible housing.

1. Current accommodation options for ACT Tertiary Students

Current accommodation options on campus at ANU

The Australian National University currently has three models of housing available through the university which accounts for about 30% of the ANU's undergraduate students:

- **Catered accommodation** – this is typical dormitory style living, with each student having their own room while sharing bathroom and laundry facilities. Students are provided with three meals a day and often snacks (fruit or cereal) are available throughout the day. Pastoral and academic support is available from Senior Residents (later year students who receive a stipend to provide these services to younger year students). The current price of this type of accommodation is around \$300 a week on a 40-week contract. Catered accommodation is desirable for the sense of community that it creates, however it is inaccessible to some students due to the high rents.

ANU currently has four of these halls: Burgmann College, John XXII College, Ursula Hall and Bruce Hall.

- **Self-catered accommodation** - these halls operate very similar to the catered accommodation however instead of meals being provided, there is a large communal kitchen which the students share. There are also Senior Residents and communal laundry and bathroom facilities are provided. The current price of this housing option is \$163 on a 41-week contract.

ANU currently has two self-catered halls: Burton and Garran Hall and Fenner Hall.

- **Apartment style accommodation** – ANU also provides the option for apartment style living on campus for undergraduates. These apartments range from studio apartments to a five room apartment. The apartments have bedrooms for each student with a communal kitchen, bathroom and living area. The apartment blocks have common rooms on the ground level. The price ranges from \$181 - \$223 a week plus additional fees for utilities. This model of accommodation has the benefit of individual, flexible living but has been criticized for not having the opportunity to foster a strong community due to everybody living in their own separate apartments.

ANU currently has four apartment style accommodation options: Davey Lodge, Kinloch Lodge and Warrumbul Lodge(all managed by UniLodge),the Laurus Wing at Ursula Hall and the Packard Wing at Bruce Hall

Current accommodation options off-campus at ANU

While many students live on campus for at least one year, most ANU students need to find accommodation off campus for some period of their degree. ANU students seek accommodation in more favourable in suburbs such as Turner, O'Connor, Lyneham, Ainslie and Dickson due to their close proximity to ANU. However the ACT rental market is notoriously difficult for students to access., Due to demand from other segments of the community, students often struggle to find affordable, housing close to campus or transport. Many real estate agents do not accept applications from groups, and students are often without previous rental referees making access even harder.

2. Student experiences

Affordability

Affordability is one of the major hurdles that students face with the current accommodation options in the ACT. While some students receive support from their parents and can afford to pay higher rents, some students live off Centrelink and Rent Assistance which at its highest is \$450 a fortnight (which is still 48% below the Henderson Poverty line and the rent assistance component is only half of what the average student pays per fortnight). Although this review is not looking at Centrelink issues, it is important to consider the issue of affordability in the context of the issues that students face in finding housing.

Communal living

Affordable housing is an issue, but communal housing is also an issue that needs to be addressed. Models such as Housing Cooperatives (as outlined below) would create opportunities for students who cannot afford to live at college to still have a communal living experience, allowing them to meet new people and create a network base in Canberra.

One possible option for the ACT Government could be that any funding given to institutions or companies to build student accommodation has a requirement attached to it that the accommodation must be built with a communal living objective in mind. Although many of the National Rental Affordability Scheme places have gone to UniLodge and the Laurus Wing at Ursula Hall, there is an equally, if not higher, demand for communal student accommodation such as that seen in the catered college models. Many students, both from interstate and overseas, can feel isolated when living in apartment style living and this needs to be addressed by the ACT Government and tertiary sector. Students who are disconnected at university are more likely to experience academic and social difficulties, and are less likely to know where to find help.

Failure of the ACT rental market

The rental market in the ACT makes it difficult for students to secure housing. They often do not accept references from residential halls and sometimes do not accept students at all. Although in it may be understandable that a landlord would prefer a family or a group of young professionals over a group of students, this inbuilt bias of real estate agents and landlords often restricts the chances of students attempting to secure housing.

Proximity

While ANU students often look for housing within a close proximity to the university, they are often required to move to suburbs further out of the city. With an infrequent public transport system and many students unable to afford cars, this can often mean that students cannot have the easy access to university that they require. When students need to study til 11pm (or later) in the library, getting back to Belconnen is often not easy and potentially unsafe. This has affected many students throughout their time at university.

3. Models used in other jurisdictions

A model that has come from the United States is Housing Cooperatives which is premised on communal living and responsibility which reduces the outsourcing of tasks leading to drastically reduced rent. A housing cooperative provides a great opportunity for students to live in cheap, communal living while learning about social cooperation and responsibility. STUCCO at the University of Sydney is the first student housing co-operative in Australia and has proven to be a very successful model (see more at: <http://stucco.org.au/>). The Canberra Student Housing Cooperative is making a further submission on this and ANUSA supports the developments of low cost student housing cooperatives in Canberra.

The major barrier to creating a student housing co-operative in Canberra is acquiring a property. The ACT Government could have a role in trialling this option in the ACT, through loaning property owned or acquired by the ACT Government to trial housing cooperatives in Canberra.

4. Strategies adopted by ACT tertiary education institutions to meet student accommodation and welfare needs

First Year Guarantee

In order to attract students from interstate, whom might not otherwise consider studying at the ANU, for fear of not finding accommodation, the ANU has a first year undergraduate accommodation guarantee. This means that all first year undergraduate students who have moved from outside the ACT to at ANU are guaranteed accommodation in university provided or approved residences. (The types of accommodation covered by the guarantee are described above in part 1)

Problems with the Guarantee

Shortage of Accommodation leading to Temporary Accommodation

In both 2010 and 2011 the undergraduate accommodation provided by the university on campus was insufficient to accommodate was all those covered by the first year accommodation guarantee. ANU's undergraduate enrolments have been increasing over the past few years, but the number of beds available on campus has not increased with the student numbers.

To fulfil the first-year accommodation guarantee, ANU has had to rent additional facilities off-campus to accommodate incoming students. In early 2011, ANU paid rent for over 200 beds in UniGardens (Belconnen) and for over 100 beds in Lyneham Motor Inn (or 'Lyneham Hall'). The university subsidised accommodation tariffs to keep the rent competitive with on-campus accommodation. Due to the unestablished collegiate environment and the lack of facilities, few students accepted accommodation offers for either UniGardens or Lyneham Motor Inn. This low occupancy has cost ANU significantly.

Employed staff at temporary accommodation

ANU employed 'Deputy Heads' to ensure that the students in UniGardens and Lyneham Hall received sufficient pastoral support. The lack of a Deputy Head at UniGardens during 2010 led to an isolating university experience that generated significant student dissatisfaction towards university life overall. In 2011, the employment of a Deputy Head improved the situation at UniGardens by facilitating active Senior Residents and a supportive student-led community.

Pastoral

The number of Senior Residents providing pastoral guidance to first-year students in UniGardens and Lyneham Hall has been equivalent to the proportion of Senior Residents in other ANU Halls and Colleges.

Community

The lack of a communal environment has been a serious issue at UniGardens and Lyneham Hall. The small number of students in these colleges has made it easy for outgoing students to enjoy university among friends, but it has led to relatively higher exclusion among less outgoing and international students, who have been finding it more difficult to benefit from events and the informal support networks that college environments typically provide. In temporary accommodation, these students are often isolated from life at university, raising concerns about their acclimatisation to independent living and their ability to take advantage of the enrichment university life at ANU typically provides. It has been difficult for temporary accommodation to address this issue, because a strong pre-existing community environment is necessary to ensure that as many students as possible are not disadvantaged socially and, in turn, mentally and academically, by the lack of support provided to them.

Facilities

Temporary accommodation students (particularly at Lyneham Hall) have been disappointed at the availability laundry and internet facilities. These factors have created unnecessary stress and cost for incoming students. The lack of sufficient common room spaces available in UniGardens has additionally limited social interaction among students, which has made it more difficult for first-year students to acclimatise and enjoy life at university. Other facilities such as transportation, bedding and bathrooms have been well-provided by ANU, at significant cost.

Conclusion

Over the last two years, ANU has taken significant steps to ensure that sufficient pastoral support is provided to first year university students in temporary accommodation. But the environment in temporary accommodation has still been difficult for students to adjust, particularly with regards to the cost involved.

Lack of choice in type of accommodation

The construction of 'UniLodge' has been a key factor of the ANU's strategy in meeting the first year guarantee and the accommodation needs of ANU students. There are currently 3 UniLodge buildings, and a fourth building is likely to be in use by 2012r. UniLodge will soon make up almost half of the on-campus accommodation available at ANU. This is largely due to UniLodge being cheaper to build than a traditional hall of residence, due to the ANU receiving NRAS funding for its construction, and due to the ANU contracting out both the construction and the management of UniLodge. Whilst for many students, UniLodge is a desired type of accommodation, most students prefer traditional halls of residences which are seen to provide a more collegiate atmosphere. The ANU has overrelied on UniLodge to fulfill its first year accommodation guarantee. Hence, many students will find themselves living in UniLodge, despite having applied to live in another residence.

5. Anticipated demand for student accommodation in the ACT

The demand for student housing from within the ACT's tertiary institutions will remain high and largely unsatisfied without direct action from all concerned parties.

Demand for student accommodation is expected to dramatically rise beginning from 2012. This is largely contributed to the deregulation of the tertiary education sector, which will see universities uncap the number places for undergraduate students. ANU is likely to be over enrolled by 2-3%, however it is unclear how the University plans on meeting the accommodation needs of these extra students.

Further with the Federal Government's proposed strategy to have 40% of Australians with university degrees, the demand for student housing will only continue to increase, therefore it is necessary to make foundational changes in order to cater for the anticipated increase.

Already there exist long waiting lists at all of the ANU's halls and residences. Even with the opening of 1000 new beds, expected for completion in 2012, demand is still expected to far outstrip supply.

6. Coordination and planning measures adopted by the ACT Government to meet anticipated needs

It is in the best interests of the ACT government, both economically and culturally, to continue to attract students to the national capital, and available student accommodation is one of the key factors considered when students are determining their tertiary institution.

ANU students are in a particularly precarious situation. Being located central to Canberra's CBD is, paradoxically, one of the bigger draw cards for the ANU, whilst also the primary inhibitor towards affordable housing. Failing to achieve residency on campus, or having completed an endurable stint, most students will look to the surrounding areas to fulfill their accommodation needs. Canberra's CBD is developing at a rapid pace, and with that development, rental prices have dramatically increased, leading to a severe lack of affordable, quality housing close to campus, reflecting the situation facing most metropolitan universities.

It is inherently difficult to maintain low rental prices when demand is admittedly so high. Therefore greater awareness of the ACT's efforts as a part of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) is required in order to educate private investors and home owners, especially in the inner-north area, of the benefits of participating in the program.

Another measure the ACT could readily adopt would be a scheme similar to the Queensland Government's One Social Housing register. Which encourages participants in the scheme to impartially accept approved tenants in return for receiving financial assistance. So essentially, in situations when financial aid is provided, the government approves tenants, thus reducing the instances of property managers unjustly profiting from the system. The Queensland scheme streamlines several affordable housing waiting lists with a universal application process across community, public and "affordable" housing, as well as moving to a needs-based process. An ACT scheme could easily incorporate a section primarily for students, given the high concentration of tertiary institutions in Canberra, which would help to ensure that the great injection students bring to the ACT economy is not strangled by a lack of housing.

In addition, there exists a great opportunity to address these housing needs in the form of the inner-north development projects being run by the ACT government, particularly along Northbourne Avenue. Allocating a portion of this new housing specifically to students would address both the needs of Canberra's tertiary students but would also keep with the goals of the project by providing housing to low-income earners. The allocation would be ideal for ANU students but could conversely be run as a joint project, given the proximity of UC, ACU, CIT and ADFA to the inner-north.

The development of a universal affordable housing allocation scheme by the ACT government and the specific allocation of new housing amongst the Northbourne development are both key ways in which the ACT Government could help to ease the burden of unaffordable housing facing Canberra's students.

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and are willing to discuss any of these points with the committee further.

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