

UNSW@ADFA

Submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly's inquiry into student accommodation

UNSW@ADFA is the Canberra campus of The University of New South Wales (UNSW) and is located at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA). The Academy was opened in 1986 and operates under an Agreement between The University of New South Wales and the Commonwealth of Australia. Due to the unique structure of the campus at ADFA, in that the land is owned by Defence, UNSW is unable to build its own accommodation on campus.

The number of postgraduate students studying at UNSW@ADFA has increased exponentially in the last five years to around 1700. Of these, the number of Higher Degree Research (HDR) students is 290 and is expected to grow as the University increases its research profile. The majority of our HDR students are from countries other than Australia. We are currently having some 75 international students (and families) commencing each year. These HDR students are an older age group, approximately 25 to 35 years old.

Affordable accommodation options in Canberra for students not from the ACT are clearly limited. While the number of international students enrolled with UNSW@ADFA is small in comparison to other ACT tertiary institutions like the Australian National University and University of Canberra, sourcing affordable accommodation options in Canberra is equally as challenging for our students.

This submission is made on behalf of the international students currently enrolled in postgraduate programs at UNSW@ADFA. If students are successful in securing affordable accommodation, they face irregular, time consuming and costly commutes to University, as many of these accommodation options are located in Queanbeyan or the outer suburbs of Canberra. Indeed, one quarter of UNSW@ADFA's international students live either outside of the ACT or within areas which are unable to access a single route bus journey to attend the campus. This option becomes necessary as students are unable to obtain accommodation that is both available and affordable closer to the UNSW, Canberra campus.

Those studying full-time with no income other than their scholarship - particularly international students - find it difficult to compete in the private market in Canberra. UNSW@ADFA provides support to students in accessing the private rental market and facilitates interaction between fellow students in order to promote sharing. Scholarship students are provided with a \$1000

start-up grant to assist them in such matters as securing tenancy, but most students use this to cover their accommodation for the first few weeks after arrival.

By way of example:

*International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (IPRS) and University College Postgraduate Research Scholarship (UCPRS) holders are provided with a living allowance of **\$442 per week**.*

*After rent, this leaves **\$80 - \$300 per week** to cover all other expenses including food, clothing, utilities, transport and entertainment.*

*CSC Scholarship holders receive a higher level of support, **\$462 per week**, but this does not apply to the majority of students.*

Average accommodation costs in the ACT range from **\$140 - \$360 per week, plus expenses**. The financial stress of providing an “upfront payment” for bond and the first month’s rent in advance is considerable, this being the equivalent of 8 weeks rent. This is a sum of between \$960 - \$3000. There are further associated costs to setting up accommodation which may require students to purchase household items (furniture, cooking utensils, etc) which can add hundreds or thousands of dollars to this initial outlay. Connection to gas, electricity and phone will add approximately \$250 to this financial burden.

As a result, our students tend to spend a period of time boarding with their supervisor or colleague until such time that they can find a more suitable arrangement. The alternative to this situation is to share accommodation, which can be far from ideal.

Higher degree research students undertaking a PhD come to Canberra to live for approximately 3 – 4 years and some 50% will bring their family with them. Whilst apartment living can be achieved our students have experienced very negative reactions from real estate agents. Most HDR international students want their family to live in a house as the children are generally very young, but there is a lack of ‘appropriate’ low rent opportunities close to the city.

There have been examples of newly arrived students having difficulties. The following extracts are taken from students emails and are therefore confidential but are used here as “real life” examples.

Student 1

At present, I'm having severe hardships in finding accommodation in Canberra and it is so costly for me. I have to pay bond and one month rent advance. I have been looking for a house since last two months, but all house inspection applications were not successful.

My family arrived on 3rd of May and we stay at Vietnamese temple, Lyneham, Canberra. The living environment in the hostel is not good for a family. Many smoke in the rooms and it is really bad for my kids. So as the other facilities like toilet etc. Many blame if the kids are crying and lot of other things.

Student 2

*I faced a lot of problems when I came here last year to start my PhD. Some of my friends applied for me for some accommodation before I even came here but they were not successful. After I came here I had to share with some of my friends for a couple of weeks before I finally succeeded in getting my own accommodation. During the period I tried for a lot of units but after that some of senior students suggested not to apply for all real estate agents houses. **Most of the housing agents do not like to rent to students.** Then I tried only with two agents and finally I got one but I had to move to Queanbeyan. This is a little bit far away from UNSW@ADFA but the most serious problem there is the lack of transportation facility there. There is only one public transport service from there to city. Also, though the rental agreement was for 1 year, after 6 month the owner told me that he needed to renovate his unit so we needed to leave the unit within 21 days. After that my friend and I struggled for another 4 weeks to find new accommodation.*

So if the university take some initiatives to arrange some housings for the international students near to UNSW@ADFA that will help the students a lot and help them to concentrate on their studies without wasting time on finding housing and long travel time from home to ADFA campus.

Student 3

I have a terrible experience in finding house in Queanbeyan. I applied five times for four houses because I had to apply twice for a single house. The first time they did not give the house to anybody, however they increased the rent from the previous rate after 15 days. After 5 attempts I have not succeeded as yet and will be bound to take help from my friends. ADFA campus is helpful in all the ways. However I always feel two problems here in Canberra.

1. Accommodation
2. Medical facilities

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