

Inter-Departmental Working Group on Student Accommodation

Minutes of Meeting of 28 September 2017

Attendees:

Chair: Mary Doyle, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education and Skills
Emma Leonard, Department of Education and Skills
Sarah Moroney, Department of Education and Skills
Sighle deBarra, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Alan Smyth, Department of Finance
Stewart Logan, Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government
Stewart Roche, Higher Education Authority
Annie Hoey, Union of Students in Ireland
Karolina Pietkiewicz, Union of Students in Ireland
Niamh Murtagh, Union of Students in Ireland
Michael Casey, Irish Universities Association
Ian Mathews, Trinity College Dublin
Michael Foley, University of Limerick
Gearoid Hodgins, Technological Higher Education Association
Mairead Hughes, NDFA
Eamonn Halpin, NDFA
Annmarie Quinn, Department of Education and Skills

Secretariat: Trudy Duffy, Rebekah Maguire, Department of Education and Skills

Apologies:

Deirdre McDonnell, Department of Education and Skills
Marie Mulvihill, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Frank Newman, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Brendan Ellison, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Patrick Brennan, Department of Finance
Gary O'Doherty, Department of Education and Skills
Vincent Landers, Department of Education and Skills

1. Minutes of Meeting of 07 March 2017

- The minutes of the previous meeting of the Group which took place on 07 March 2017 were agreed.

2. Outline of Pipeline Projects

<i>Status</i>	<i>Bedspaces</i>	<i>Location</i>
Delivered since <i>Rebuilding Ireland</i>	2602	
Development underway on-site	3807	Dublin (Majority), Cork, Galway
Planning Permission Granted	3983	Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Louth
Planning Permission Applied	2212	Cork, Dublin, Galway

- There have been a number of consultative planning applications to An Bord Pleanála (3 developments in Maynooth, UCC and Stillorgan) as well as potential projects at TCD (300 spaces) and UCC (480 spaces) as outlined in recent press statements
- At the moment, the target of 7,000 beds by 2019 appears achievable.
- TCD holds a medium term lease on city centre PBA which were fully booked in July, but which has seen a drop off rate on students taking up the accommodation which is priced at below market rate. Other off-campus PBA are at 100% occupancy rate and the issue may be related to the timing of the release of the accommodation. USI agreed to work with TCD to publicise the availability of accommodation to students.

Action: The Steering Group asked that these numbers be circulated as a note and they will be included in a September report. An extra 1,500 units are in build and this is seen as very positive.

3. Actions arising from National Student Accommodation Strategy

3.1. See Appendix I for summary update on Action Plan

3.2. USI Student Housing Report Highlights (Action Point 7)

- **Response Rates and Summary Statistics**
 - 3597 responses. 97% were full-time students; 89% undergraduates; >7% were international students
 - 33% of students live in purpose-built accommodation (PBSA); 31% in privately rented accommodation; 7% in digs (the number of homeowners availing of tax free income from rent-a-room scheme have risen by 4,160 between 2004 and 2015)
 - Choices overlap with preferences: 41% ranked PBSA as their first accommodation option.
 - Reasons for taking accommodation: 24% - they couldn't find anything else; 4% - time pressure. For almost 10% of students their accommodation is not, or may not be, permanent.
 - Students without accommodation: 38 students stated they have no accommodation. They sleep in friends' couches/floors and cars. In two cases

students stated they sleep on the streets. 429 out of 7,000 homeless on the night Census 2016 was taken were students.

- 9 in 10 respondents have signed an agreement in digs-style accommodation and less than half of those who stay in privately rented accommodation, have signed a written contract.

- **Finances**

- 58% of students declared the monthly cost of accommodation of €251-500; half of them have an income not exceeding €500/m. Student's income is almost immediately spent on their accommodation leaving little or no fund for travel or other costs associated with college.
- Over 20% of students experience unexpected rent increases.
- 36% students do not get receipts for their deposits.

- **Timeframes**

- 36% of students needed from one to three months to find their accommodation. Given that one in five students started looking for accommodation in August, there might have not been enough time to secure their bed spaces for college.

- **Satisfaction Rates**

- Almost 1/10 of students are living in digs-style accommodation with 66% of students being satisfied with this arrangement. While majority of students prefer accommodation that's reasonably priced, and near college, digs can be a beneficial alternative for a lot of students.
- Despite rather high satisfaction levels, a cohort of students (347) have shared negative experiences with their accommodation; e.g. poor assistance from accommodation providers, high prices not reflected in standard of accommodation, poor conditions.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) are at a risk of physical and mental health deterioration and higher overall cost due to unsuitable accommodation conditions. For instance, due to poor insulation and damp, students have to spend more on heating to be able to keep their houses warm enough or dry clothes. A significant number of students have experienced poor accommodation conditions:
 - 24% - mould
 - 21% - damp
 - 21% - inadequate heating
 - 19% - high levels of noise
 - Only 11% of respondents stated that had not experienced any inconveniences.
- 25% of respondents had a dispute with their landlords - the majority in PBSA or privately rented. Only 115 students sought professional help - mainly in the local Students' Unions. Therefore, we need to provide better training for the officers in colleges, so they can better assist students.

4. Discussion on possible student accommodation forum/expansion of group (Action Point 6)

- It was agreed that unless there was a compelling reason for the expansion of the steering group that there was sufficient representation at the current time. In the event that additional information in a specific area is required then representation from relevant groups can be invited to present at a meeting.
- It was agreed that a forum would be a positive step and discussion around a forum/conference on student accommodation would continue and be developed.

5. Next Steps

- A Student Accommodation Forum will be held in 2018. Further details to be explored.
- Assess ability to track the unmet demand for student accommodation and the potential for data collection/assessment of demand.

6. A.O.B

- Appreciation was conveyed to Annmarie Quinn for her work on the Steering Group and the National Student Accommodation Strategy.

The next Steering Group meeting is envisaged for early Q1 in 2018.

Appendix I – Update on action plan

Number	Action Point	Responsibility	Update 29 Sep 2017
1	In order to have a comprehensive picture of the progress of development in the sector the DES in conjunction with the HEA will track the progression of all developments of PBSA from pre-planning stage right through to completion and provide a quarterly update on progress.	DES in conjunction with HEA	Ongoing. First quarterly report due end September.
2	Monitor the effects of the implementation of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act, 2016 on the speed of granting of planning permission for PBSA and continue to work with HEIs and the DHPCLG to speed up the process of applications for planning permission if that is deemed necessary in the future.	DES in conjunction with DHPCLG	Active since July 2017. Anecdotal evidence is that the application process is slow for some developments but it is a learning process regarding completeness of the application rather than delays in the system per-se.
3	Monitor Planning Permissions Granted to ensure that there are no undue restrictions placed on the development of PBSA.	DES in conjunction with HEA	Ongoing
4	The inter-departmental steering group on student accommodation will monitor the development of PBSA to ensure that there is not a proliferation of change of use permissions sought in respect of planning permissions granted for PBSA	DES in conjunction with Interdepartmental Steering group	Ongoing
5	Maintain the established inter-departmental steering group on student accommodation as a co-ordinating mechanism to ensure that all stakeholders, including HEIs, have access to detailed information regarding student accommodation including information relating to potential financing and delivery models.	DES	Ongoing
6	At its next meeting the inter-departmental steering group on student accommodation will consider: (i) Whether the membership of the Group should be expanded to include representatives of private developers and managers of PBSA (ii) Whether the membership of the Group should be expanded to include representatives of financing providers (Housing Finance Agency (HFA), European Investment Bank (EIB), Ireland Strategic	DES and Interdepartmental Steering group	See Agenda item 4

	Investment Fund (ISIF)); (iii) Whether a once-off or annual forum or conference on student accommodation should be created.		
7	The inter-departmental steering group on student accommodation will examine the data that is derived from the USI survey once it has been published. USI will also outline its future plans for conducting periodic national surveys on student accommodation. The inter-departmental steering group will contribute to the development of future national surveys on student accommodation.	DES and Interdepartmental Steering group	Report circulated prior to meeting and summary presented.
8	DES and DHPCLG to work with HEIs and the HFA with a view to accelerating the provision of financing for PBSA projects. The HFA have already commenced work on the preparatory legal work necessary to deal with applications for financing from HEIs for the purpose of building PBSA. The HFA will also implement a dedicated streamlined application process for HEIs.	DES/DHPCLG/HFA/HEI	Ongoing
9	Develop and run workshops on financing models and mechanisms for HEIs on how they can access and structure the financing of PBSA, especially in terms of off-balance sheet solutions, with identified key stakeholders including the EIB, ISIF, NTMA, the HFA and the HEIs. This will build on the National Information Session on Student Accommodation which was previously hosted by the DES.	DES	May be built into Agenda item 4
10	Officials from DES will continue to liaise with officials from DHPCLG in relation to the development of the Housing Land Map and database detailing publicly controlled lands available for new housing development including PBSA. DES will continue to arrange and facilitate meetings between relevant stakeholders where potential for PBSA is identified.	DES and DHPCLG	The Housing Land Map was published in April 2017

11	The DES will support DIT in developing their proposed off-balance sheet service concession model with a view to ensuring that it delivers on campus PBSA for DIT in Grangegorman.	DES in conjunction with DIT & NDFA	Continuing to assess impacts from Eurostat. Grangegorman project has increased from 700 bedspaces to 1,200.
12	Following finalisation of the model for DIT in Grangegorman, the DES will explore, with THEA, the representative body for the sector, the HEA and other IoTs, the potential for this model to be used by other IoTs for the development of PBSA where there is unmet demand for PBSA in the area and projects are financially viable.	DES/THEA/HEA	See item 11
13	Financing mechanisms will be examined with a view to seeking to identify other potential off-balance sheet solutions which could enable IoTs to develop further PBSA projects where there is unmet demand for PBSA and projects are financially viable.	Inter-departmental Steering Group	See item 11
14	HEIs will consult with all relevant stakeholders, including USI, local students' unions, student parents, lone parents and students with disabilities, on the adaptation of existing stock of PBSA and on the design for new PBSA.	HEIs	The Minister has written to IoTs and Universities to encourage bed spaces for lone parents, student parents, and students with disabilities as additional on campus bed spaces are delivered.
15	HEIs will ensure that their Accommodation offices/officers are aware of the specific needs of student parents, including lone parents, and are able to provide appropriate information to such students on sourcing accommodation.	HEIs	See item 14
16	HEIs are encouraged to allocate additional bed spaces for student parents, lone parents and students with disabilities as additional on campus bed spaces are delivered.	HEIs	See item 14
17	HEIs to engage with private developers of PBSA to determine whether formal or informal nomination agreements can be put in place to facilitate the provision of PBSA to students attending HEIs.	HEIs	Minister has written to developers to make them aware of PBS.

18	USI to continue to run their #HomesforStudy campaigns.	USI	<p>USI Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently preparing an evaluation report • Homes advertised – 1000 • Digs Campaign – 130,000 flyers distributed • 100 Student Reps trained in conjunction with Residential Tenancies Board for finance and accommodation guides
19	DES to monitor the outcomes of the Working Group which has been established to examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords (or rental accommodation providers).	DES	The report on the tax treatment of landlords or rental accommodation providers is with the Minister for Finance. Not published as yet.
20	Enhance co-operation between the HEI Accommodation offices/officers and the local Students' Unions and the USI Accommodation Officer with a view to alleviating the difficulty for students in accessing accommodation. HEIs will ensure that their accommodation offices/officers are in a position to provide specific information on sourcing accommodation, including providing referrals to relevant third-party accommodation providers/service.	HEIs and SUs	<p>USI have been funded for the training of accommodation officers.</p> <p>UCD SU have received funding for a campaign to address student accommodation issues.</p>
21	DES to work with DHPCLG and local authorities to emphasise the demand for additional PBSA, and the additional benefits that will arise from its development, as well as to further support and work with both HEIs and private developers to support the further development of PBSA.	DES	Ongoing
22	The USI, local Students' Unions and HEIs will work together to highlight the potential for regeneration, community involvement, civic activities and engagement that arises from having an accommodation mix in an area that includes a significant proportion of student accommodation including PBSA through local and national campaigns.	HEIs/USI/SUs	'Campus Engage' programme is being run in a number of HEIs - USI programme to increase awareness of being a good neighbour through student volunteering and outreach.

23	HEIs in conjunction with USI and/or local students' unions will promote awareness of the importance of 'being a good neighbour' to students through the USI and the RTB annual Finance and Accommodation Guide or local Student Handbooks and through the work of students' union representatives. HEIs will give consideration to the development of a Finance and Accommodation Guide to be distributed to all students when enrolling and registering. This would emphasise the importance of promoting respect for the local community and potentially include information in relation to the local neighbourhood	HEIs/USI/Sus	See item 22
24	HEIs will further support the development of volunteering opportunities for students and staff members in local community engagement and community projects. This could include the identification with local community groups and organisations of particularly suitable projects for the involvement of students.	HEIs	See item 22
25	HEIs will continue to promote and develop the community utilisation of campus facilities.	HEIs	Ongoing
26	Developers and managers of PBSA will be encouraged to develop and work on community engagement projects with a view to strengthening their role and acceptance in the community.	Developers and managers of PBSA	Minister has written to developers to encourage community engagement.
27	All developers and managers of PBSA should put in place an appropriate Management Plan for PBSA in order to minimise potential negative impacts of the development and its occupants on surrounding properties and neighbourhoods and to create a positive and safe living environment for students and develop and enhance the neighbourhoods in which they are situated for the betterment of the whole community.	Developers and managers of PBSA	Minister has written to developers to encourage community engagement.