

## **Inter-Departmental Working Group on Student Accommodation**

### **Minutes of Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

#### **Attendees:**

*Chair: William Beausang, Department of Education and Skills*

Ben Archibald -Union of Students of Ireland  
Cillian Moran – Department of Public Expenditure and Reform  
Craig Ennis – Department of Education and Skills  
Jim Miley – Irish Universities Association  
Julia Bostridge – Irish Universities Association/ UCD  
Mariaam Bhatti – Housing Officer, Union of Students of Ireland  
Michael Foley - Irish Universities Association / UL  
Síona Cahill – President, Union of Students Ireland  
Stewart Roche - Higher Education Authority  
Mairead Hughes – NDFA  
Eamonn Halpin - NDFA

#### **Apologies:**

Emma Leonard –Department of Education and Skills  
Gearoid Hodgins - Technological Higher Education Association  
Peter Reynolds – Trinity College Dublin  
Stewart Logan - Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government  
Michael Casey - Irish Universities Association

**Secretariat:** Trudy Duffy and Donna Maguire, Department of Education and Skills

#### **1. Minutes of Meeting 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

Following on from the discussion which took place at the meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> December, DES officials provided clarity with regard the information which had been shared with the Minister on 18<sup>th</sup> October reflecting the perspectives of group members in relation to the potential legislative amendments.

There was some discussion around the Terms of Reference of the group and the importance of ensuring that the Terms reflect the requirements of the group. The Transparency Code obligations were outlined and it was agreed that the Terms of Reference would be reviewed to take these obligations into account.

The minutes were agreed subject to minor amendments to be provided by Michael Foley.

## **2. Rent increases in purpose Built Student Accommodation**

Concerns were expressed by group members regarding the potential legislative amendments of the RTA relating to student accommodation and the potential for impacts upon future supply and costs of same.

It was further outlined by the HEA representative that even if all projects in development are completed as expected there will still be a deficit of 17,000 bed spaces nationally. On a personal basis, the representative indicated that the timing may not be appropriate for rent predictability measures.

USI confirmed that they are in favour of rent predictability measures.

The IUA expressed a view that putting aside risk to supply, further discussion is merited around this issue with regard to the risk to the financial arrangement / model and the administrative costs that may arise which could ultimately reside with the student. The IUA confirmed that the university sector are opposed to the potential legislative amendments and will make submissions to that effect. The inclusion of HEI-owned PBSA under the legislative amendments was queried as HEI-owned PBSA is a not-for-profit endeavour with any revenue earned invested back into the accommodation and facilities.

It was suggested that flexibility is required in order that the model remain self-financing. It was advised that the model used in UL operates such that the build costs of new PBSA are offset by raising rents slightly in older complexes which allows rents to be set at reasonable levels in the newer developments – ‘bring equilibrium’. The IUA stated that their objective is to achieve affordable rents for students without creating any anomalies, for example an issue may arise in multi-campus HEIs whereby the costs for PBSA owned by one entity may have to be set at different rates according to location and designated rent pressure zones.

DES officials outlined increases in rent costs of HEI-owned PBSA from the academic year 2018/19 to the 2019/20 academic year, with some double digit increases evident. IUA highlighted that there were a reflection of ‘blended averages’ with regard to new and old accommodation and that HEI-owned PBSA is let at a cost below the average rent in the private market. The issue was also raised that if rent predictability measures are introduced outside of Dublin it may render the development of PBSA economically unviable as the existing stock of PBSA has not been geared highly enough; more controls on an underdeveloped market means that the market will not develop.

The extent to which the Minister had been informed of the issues arising from the perspective of the IDWG was queried. It was confirmed that the Minister of State had been briefed on the concerns arising from members of the IDWG.

Further reference was made to the potential issues and unintended consequences which may arise as a result of inserting an extra party into the regulation of HEI-owned PBSA - heretofore the HEIs have complete control with respect to control of the licence; the right to move students; and the enforcement of any resulting necessary disciplinary measures. Concerns were raised on the impacts of ongoing RTB dispute resolution procedures which

may result in a situation whereby the HEI may need to await the outcome of a dispute/appeal before addressing the issue.

It was suggested that the discussion taking place may be getting confused between the provisions which were proposed by the Sinn Fein Pirate Members Bill and the amendments which are intended to accompany DHPLG’s Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill. DES officials outlined the proposed amendments and advised that the draft legislation represents all views in the context of the overarching housing legislation with an awareness of education needs.

The Chair asked the IUA if they intend to make an official submission in respect of the issues raised and advised that in the interests of transparency it may be necessary to publish any submissions made. It was advised that a formal submission will be made to the Minister in respect of the issues outlined above.

The Chair also advised that there is the potential to hold a bilateral meeting with affected external stakeholders once the legislation has been published, if members so wish.

### 3. Current status and outline of pipeline projects

#### a) Outline of pipeline projects

<i>Status</i>	<i>Year End 2017</i>	<i>End November 2018</i>	<i>End February 2019</i>	<i>Location</i>
Bedspaces completed since <i>Rebuilding Ireland</i>	2,606	5,593	6,362	
Bedspaces on-site	4,553	5,187	5,265	Dublin (Majority), Cork, Limerick
Planning Permission Granted	6,927	7,691	6,747	Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Louth
Planning Permission Applied	1,816	524	2,211	Carlow, Cork, Dublin
<b>Totals</b>	<b>15,902</b>	<b>19,265</b>	<b>20,585</b>	

- 5,265 bed currently on-site
- 7,747 spaces have been granted permission – of these c.6,000 are privately owned, with just under 1,200 in the public sector
- Permission has been granted for 524 bed spaces

#### b) Update on change of use

- It was advised that between 4-500 PBSA units in Tralee have changed use and are now for use in the private rental market

- The query has been circulated to HEIs in order to ascertain the number of units still in use as PBSA.

A further update will be provided to group members at the next meeting of the IDWG in June.

#### **4. Actions arising from the National Student Accommodation Strategy and updates from Members**

##### **a) #HomesforStudy Campaign Report 2018**

A summary of the 2018 #HomesforStudy campaign evaluation was given to the group. It was advised that the patterns identified and shared with the group in the December meeting have remained the same.

USI will circulate the report to the group upon completion.

#### **5. Actions arising**

**Action:** Advise group members of amendments once the legislation is published. A bilateral meeting will be organised to accommodate this if members wish (DES)

**Action:** Update Terms of Reference of the Group and circulate to group members (DES)

**Action:** Circulate proposed amendments to minutes of previous meeting (MF)

#### **6. Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the IDWG for Student Accommodation will take place on Tuesday the 11<sup>th</sup> June at 2:30pm in room G13/14 in the Department of Education and Skills.