



UCD Students' Union

Accommodation Report

2023

Analysis, data and insight into a national crisis



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FOREWORD

A cursory look at Irish media coverage every August and September for the past decade tells a particular story. Students and their representatives plead with Government for immediate action on the provision of student housing and 12 months later, their successors make the same plea. Every summer for student representative bodies is like déjà vu all over again as we wonder just how much worse matters can get.

While the rhetoric from successive Governments about the inability to solve a crisis overnight has remained the same, the past decade has seen isolated incidents of students commuting long hours, couch surfing and worse, become more and more commonplace. The crisis takes on many layers. That it so badly impacts students who come to study from abroad is beneath contempt. Acting as a major barrier to access, we must also bear in mind those who opt out of pursuing a college education altogether.

UCD Students' Union is extremely grateful to our members, the 1,553 UCD students who took part in our now annual Student Accommodation survey which ran between November and December 2022, as well as the 963 respondents to our 2021 survey. UCD Students' Union believes that every student deserves to pursue their career and their life ambitions free of economic hardship and with all of the support they require. As long as this crisis persists and affects the lives of UCD students, our organisation will continue to lend its voice to campaigns, partnerships and proposals that we believe will make a lasting positive change and hold those who uphold the status quo to account.



Molly Greenough

UCD Students' Union President 2022/23

METHODOLOGY

The findings of this report are based on the responses given to two anonymous surveys conducted online by UCDSU. A total of 1,553 respondents filled in the 2022 iteration. The completion of the 2021 survey by 963 respondents provided a level of year-on-year comparisons and also laid bare the length of time that UCD students renting in Dublin have been impacted by this crisis.

Both surveys consisted of a mixture of yes/no, open-ended and multiple choice questions. Aside from running information stalls on campus, UCDSU shared the survey on its social and digital platforms and distributed it across its network of class reps, activists and volunteers, as well as the university's network of clubs and societies.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1 All too many UCD students pay considerably more for a roof to support their studies than the supposed average (€469 according to a recent HEA report).
- 2 There has been a notable rise in the number of UCD students availing of digs-style arrangements as a last resort. This is an area that demands immediate regulation so that students can secure an agreement with homeowners that provides a level of dignity and security.
- 3 The acute shortage of beds is starting to have a seriously worrying impact on the pursuit of education, particularly during the first few weeks of the academic year.
- 4 There is a clear emergence of a two-tier student experience in which students who are lucky enough to be able to live on campus or who can rent with a degree of comfort are increasingly the only ones who can make the most of college life.
- 5 The mental health of UCD students continues to be put at risk from the sheer pressure of finding a place to stay, the cost associated and the lack of security of tenure.
- 6 The crisis has several layers, with some of those who come to study from abroad and groups already underrepresented in UCD feeling a particular strain.

Recommendations

Based on the input of respondents to our surveys over two years, as well as our interactions with policymakers, politicians and University management, we set out our recommendations below.

Government

1 With any meaningful improvements unlikely in the short-term, the Government must address other pressing economic factors for students.

- a. Abolish tuition fees completely, not just because of the financial burdens faced by students and their families, but because it is the right thing to do. This would allow students and their families to decide how for themselves how to make the best of a dire situation while also making a strong statement that Ireland really does value higher education as a public good. There is enough strength in the Irish economy make this investment and the rainy day for students is today.
- b. Expand SUSI grants in order to once again ensure that student financial supports are fit for purpose and can take into account the material cost of sourcing student accommodation. There should also be a radical overhaul in terms of moving away from assumptions that families will cover the cost of college for students. An assessment of students as individuals would herald a new era in student financial supports that are fit for purpose and prevent so many falling through the cracks.

2 The Government should redouble its efforts to provide genuinely affordable student beds:

The State has finally started to move away from market principles and has accepted that non-market measures are going to be needed in order to solve the housing crisis. This ideological shift must also be reflected in student accommodation policy. The long-awaited new student accommodation strategy and the Government's Housing for All strategy must have bespoke measures for students that are based on genuine student affordability. All options, such as student cost rental and the leveraging of Approved Housing Bodies should be considered in order to achieve this. This would surely take more students out of the PRS space over the long-term. There is also a need for significant Government intervention and state-funding to deliver affordable cost-rental accommodation on college campuses.

Recommendations

3 Take meaningful steps to protect vulnerable students in digs:

While acknowledging the urgent need to minimise the number of students who end up in digs, there has to be acceptance they are going to be a mainstay of the student housing landscape for the foreseeable future. Meaningful steps to ensure better regulation of digs-style arrangements should be taken ahead of the new academic year, offering certainty and piece of mind for both students and homeowners. The Rent-a-Room Relief Scheme available to homeowners comes at a cost for the exchequer and it would not be unreasonable to ask that homeowners meet some basic criteria in order to claim it back.

- UCD**
- 1 Urgent action is required at university level to aid with the pressure felt at the start of the year. UCD must pull out all the stops to minimise student neglect of studies brought on by the search for accommodation.
 - 2 Management must commit to a phased cut in rental prices, decoupling them from any “market rate”, in order to proactively aid students in mitigating increases to the cost of living.
 - 3 Commitment to genuine affordability as a central pillar of future accommodation developments. UCD should also use its power and influence ensure that it does not need to depend upon attracting international student in order to make up for the shortfall in government funding. This treatment of international students as has clearly impacted management thinking when it comes to the development of on-campus luxury accommodation.

UCDSU

The last bit of food for thought in this report stems from us asking respondents to consider “What actions would you like to see the UCDSU take in a campaign regarding the student housing crisis?” The responses within show us that UCD students think critically about the housing crisis and its impacts both at a campus level amid the elitism of luxury-built student accommodation, and at a societal level where students and other cohorts are denied fairness, justice and dignity by Ireland’s housing system. On the whole, students want their students’ union to continue to campaign for lower rents and better quality accommodation, to make them aware of their rights as tenants and to be a part of effective campaigns that lead directly to better outcomes for student renters.

Backdrop to the Student Accommodation crisis

Students living in UCD's on-campus accommodation are paying the most expensive rates in the country. Justifications for rent increases have often been "because it is the market rate" and it was insisted upon that the building of luxury rooms is part of the solution. UCD is a product of its environment and it should come as no surprise that a society that has become so comfortable with the financialisation of housing includes universities that have seen a value in prioritising luxury student accommodation for the few rather than genuinely affordable, purpose built accommodation for the many.



Off-campus, UCD students face an increasingly impossible task of finding secure and affordable accommodation in Dublin's decrepit Private Rental Sector (PRS). From an all-time high, rents jumped 13.7% last year, according to the Q4 Report published by Daft.ie. Within this report, Dublin had the highest average rate, at €2,324 per month. Even in the rare instances where students can afford to pay such extortionate rents, competing against working professionals is all too increasingly unrealistic for students. As a result, students end up in unregulated digs-style accommodation or substandard rental accommodation, unable to ask for repairs for fear of being evicted; issues which we were also keen to shed a light on in this report.

UCDSU recognises that the Student Accommodation crisis is a strand of a much broader housing catastrophe. The number of people who are homeless has reached a new record high of 11,988, according to the Department of Housing's May 2023 Homeless Quarterly Progress Report. While voices across civil society and the political spectrum differ over their preferred solutions, there is widespread acceptance that Ireland's housing system needs a radical overhaul.



"It is timely to reflect that 11,542 people living in emergency accommodation only a year ago seemed unthinkable. 2023 needs to be a year of delivery for those at the sharpest end of the ongoing housing crisis or we will see the unthinkable surpassed and redefined each month." –

– Ian Talbot, Chief Executive of Chambers Ireland, March 2023

"Official policy has conspired to lock an entire generation out of the housing market, denying countless thousands any prospect of secure, independent living. • No one has been left unscathed by this crisis: young workers, families, students, older people, children, women, Travellers, single parents, people with disabilities, those in direct provision."

– Raise The Roof, 'A New Deal For Housing', November 2022.

“The housing crisis has increasingly become a concern in relation to cohesion in the workplace and society more broadly. Younger workers, in particular, are financially pressed by ever-higher rents and the receding prospect of homeownership. This ultimately spills over into issues around well-being and productivity in the workplace, while in the longer-term, if left unchecked, will also create emerging challenges in terms of pension adequacy and people’s broader stake in society over the coming decades.”

– Fergal O’Brien, Ibec Executive Director of
Lobbying & Influence, January 2023

Students and their representatives have consistently rejected attempts to be pitted against other vulnerable cohorts who are every bit as entitled to a roof over their heads as students and young people in pursuit of an education. Furthermore, the announcement of a new student accommodation strategy is finally an admission at Government level that the developer-led model of providing student housing has failed and that the pursuit of Further and Higher Education is deserving of its own bespoke housing provisions. This problem is not new. Sometimes it seems like inaction and sometimes it seems like things are working exactly as intended for those who benefit from the way that things are. Regardless of the intent, the impact it has had on an entire generation of students should guide the way for the change that is needed.

It is the strongly held view of consecutive years of UCD Students’ Union representatives that this is unacceptable of a country which apparently places a high value on education. Education is truly a public good, and if universal access is an ambition for this country, then sweeping changes must be made in order to reflect this. As our recommendations allude to, these changes are needed on a number of fronts at both university and Government level.

This report shines a light on the circumstances that students and young people will endure simply to better themselves and put themselves in a position where they can actively contribute to Irish life and society. Unfortunately, the impact of the housing crisis does not stop at the pursuit of education. The chronic shortage of beds for UCD students has become the elephant in the room in so many conversations at the many committees our elected representatives attend. This report reveals that the overall student experience and the mental health of students has also suffered badly amid Ireland’s housing dystopia.

How have UCD students responded?

UCDSU has been campaigning at campus level and nationally as part of various coalitions for a change of approach. UCDSU has lent the voice of UCD students to the Raise the Roof campaign and the Cost of Living Coalition and the push to enshrine a right to housing in the Irish constitution. Over the last two summers, UCDSU played a role in keeping the issue in the national spotlight through direct confrontation an on-campus 'Cut the Rent' campaign (2019) with Dublin City Council (2021) and a Digs Drive (2022) which garnered a significant amount of local and national coverage in print and broadcast media. As the voice of UCD students we are constantly seeking feedback from our members to gauge the severity of the crisis and to figure out how students should respond.

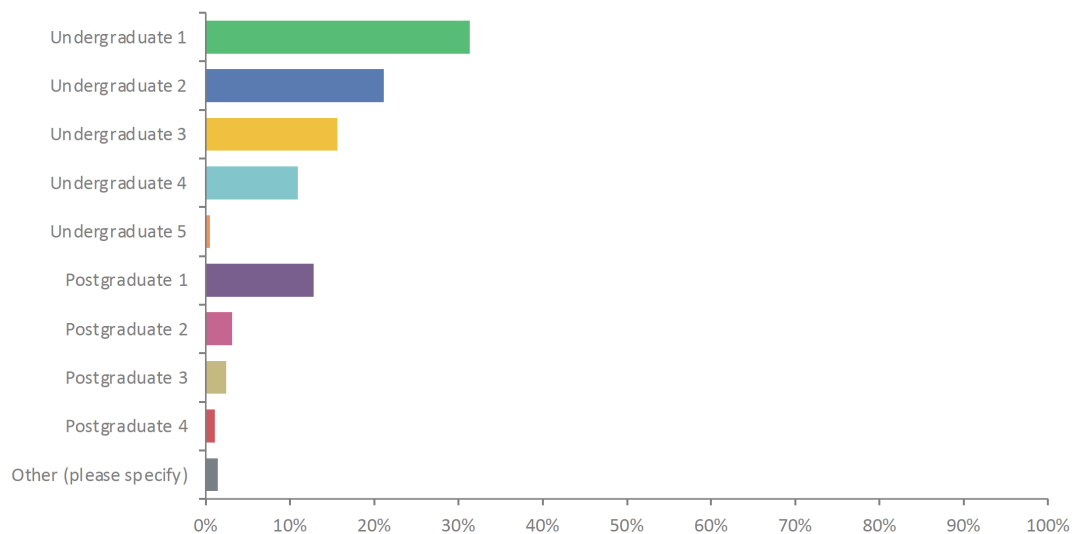


RESPONSES

While UCDSU acknowledges that this is not a representative sample of the overall UCD student body, this report still acts as an important snapshot in time, providing unique and detailed insight into the impact of the seemingly ever-worsening student accommodation crisis on the academic progress and overall wellbeing of our members.

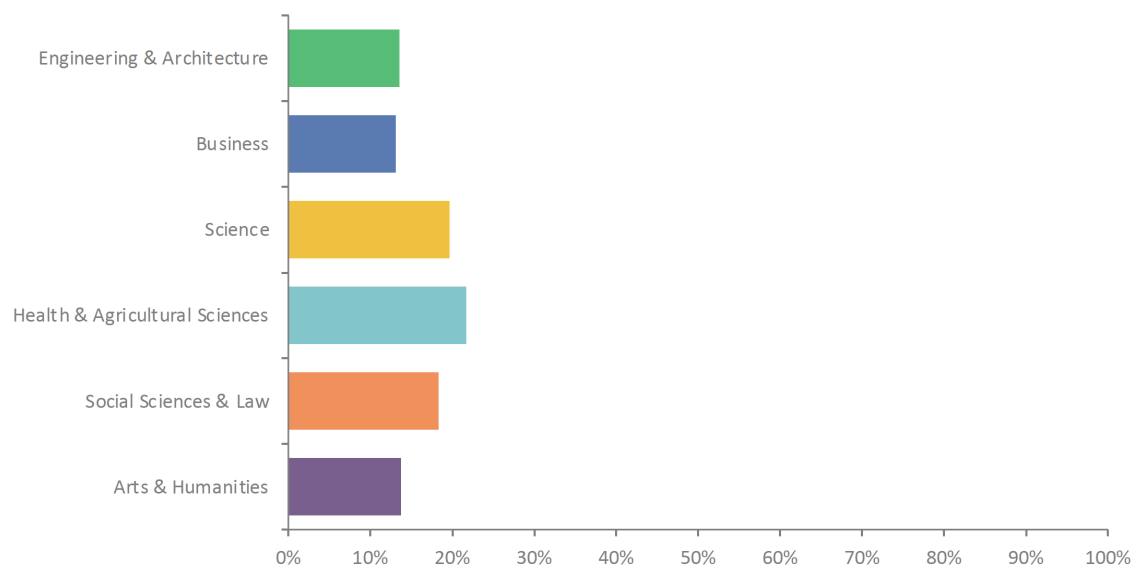
Q1: What is your current year of study?

Answered: 1553 ,: 0



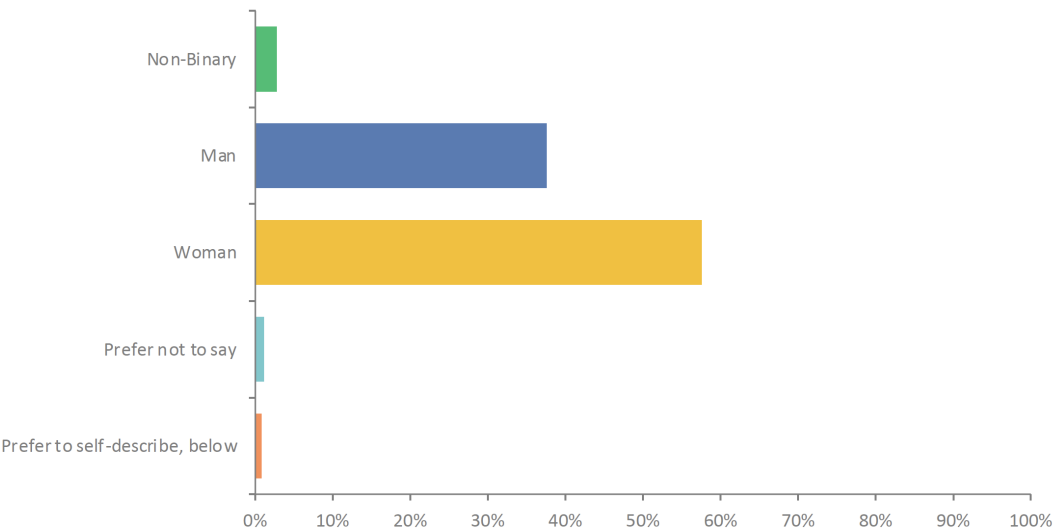
Q2: Which UCD College do you belong to?

Answered: 1550 ,: 3



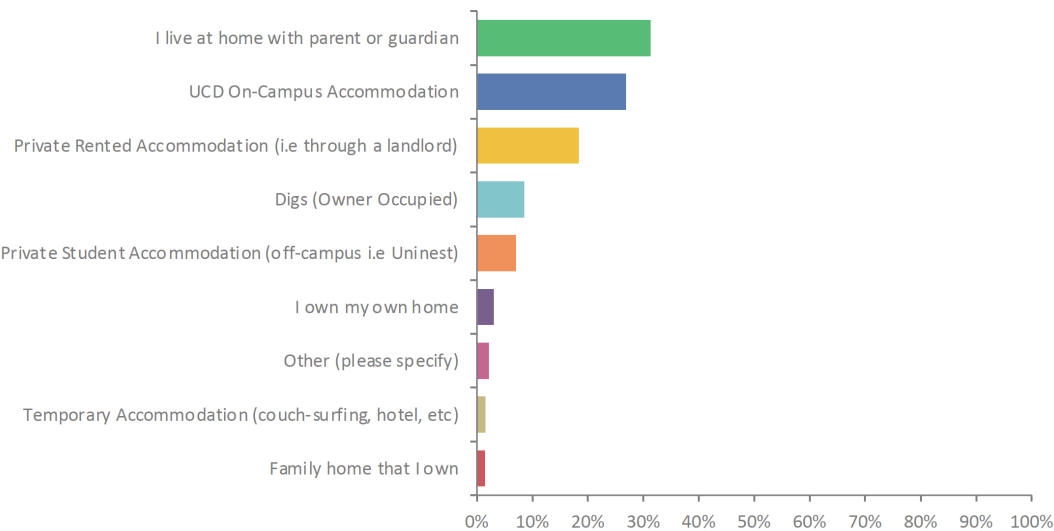
Q3: Gender: How do you identify?

Answered: 1548 ; 5



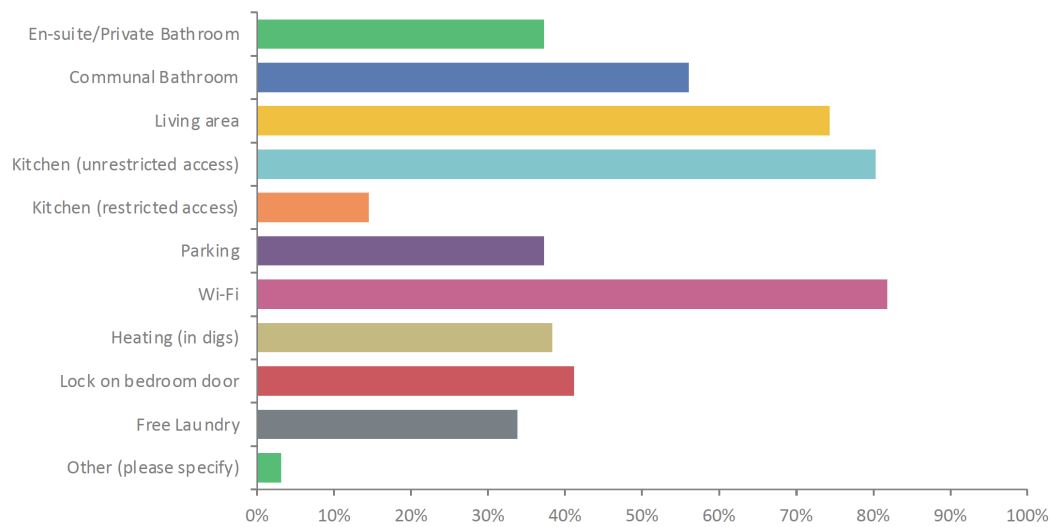
Q4: What is the type of accommodation you are living in?

Answered: 1553 ; 0



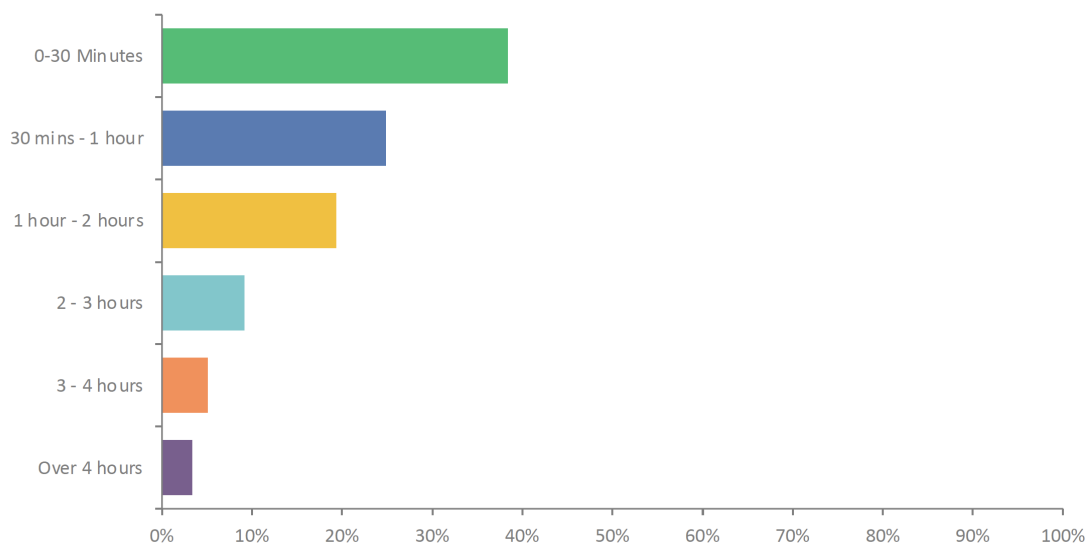
Q5: What facilities are available within your accommodation?

Answered: 1530 ; 23



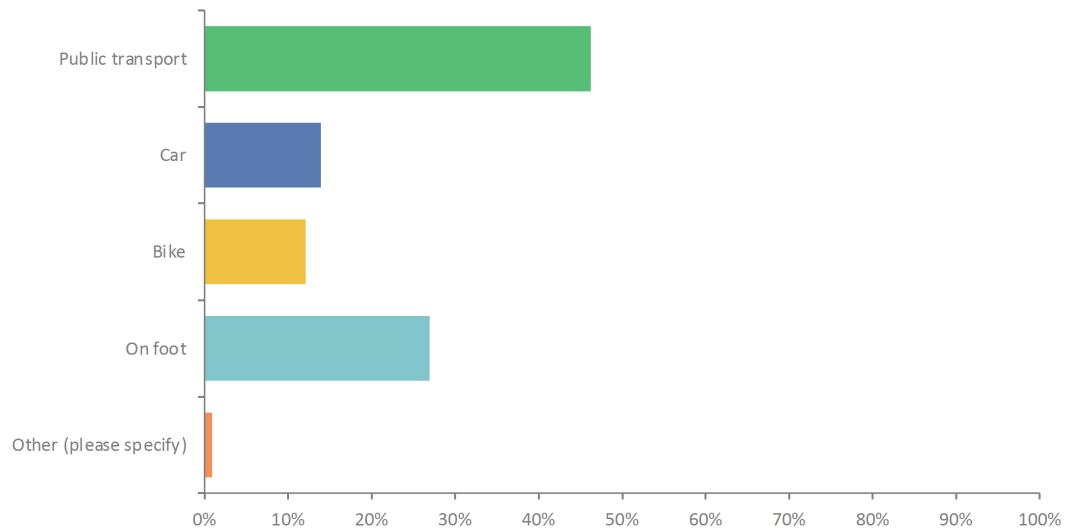
Q6: What is the TOTAL amount of time you spend commuting to UCD per day?

Answered: 1548 ; 5



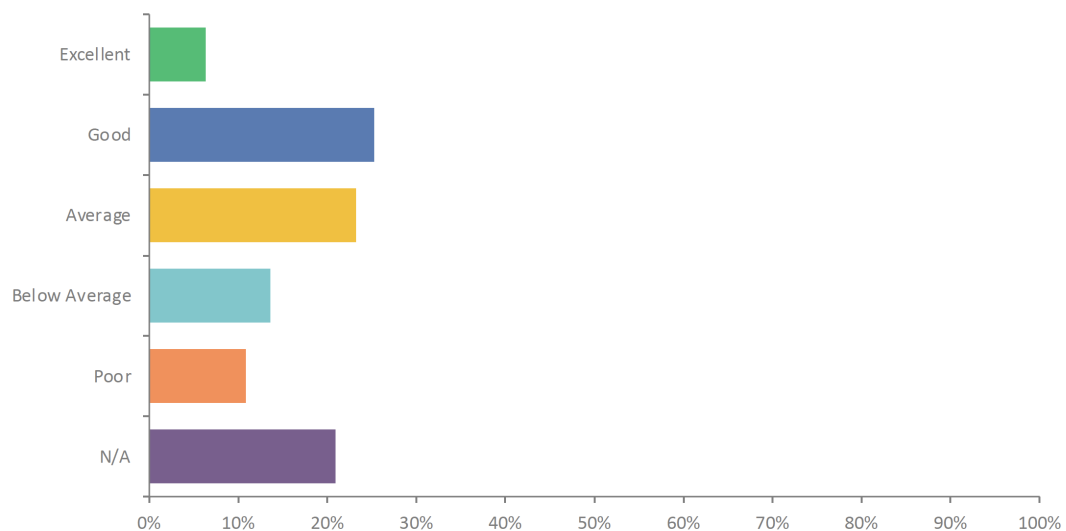
Q7: What is your most common means of travelling to UCD?

Answered: 1545 ,: 8



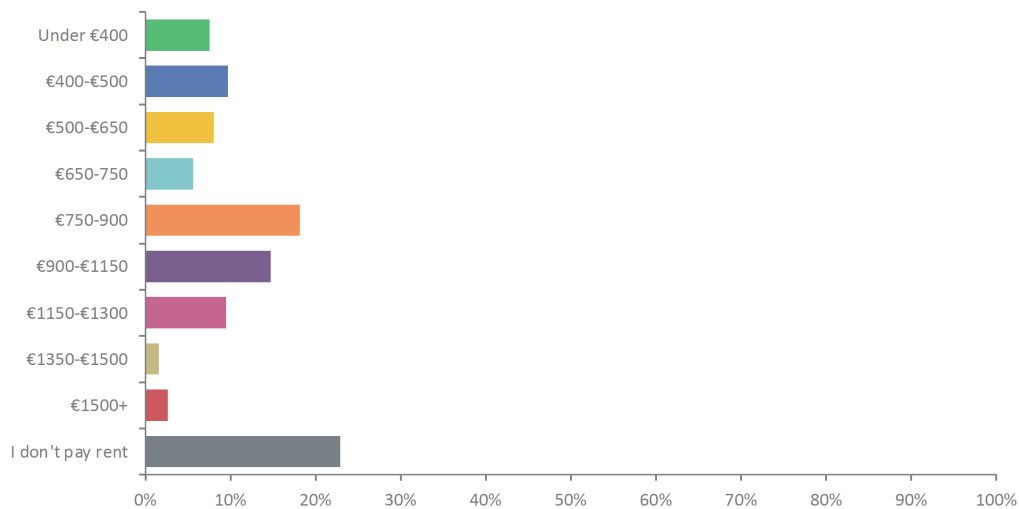
Q9: If you rely on public transport as your primary means of getting to UCD, how would you rate the reliability of it?

Answered: 1443 ,: 110



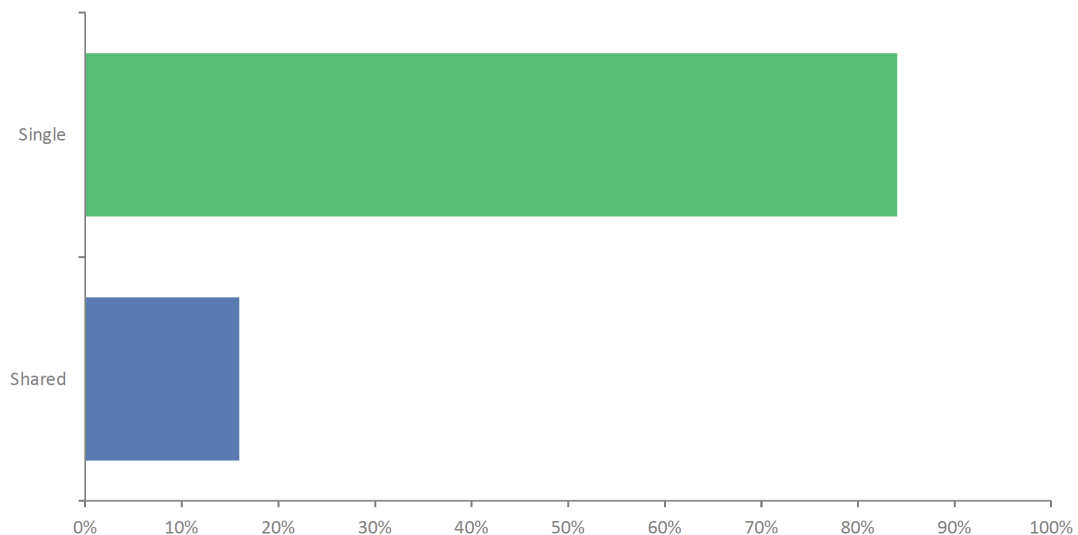
Q10: How much are you paying monthly?

Answered: 1540 ,: 13



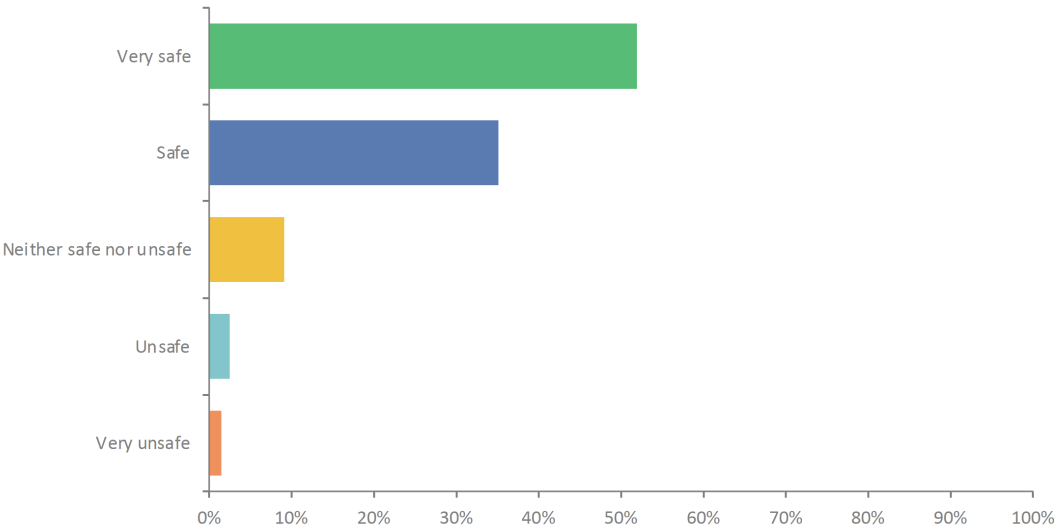
Q11: Do you live in a single room or shared room?

Answered: 1530 ,: 23



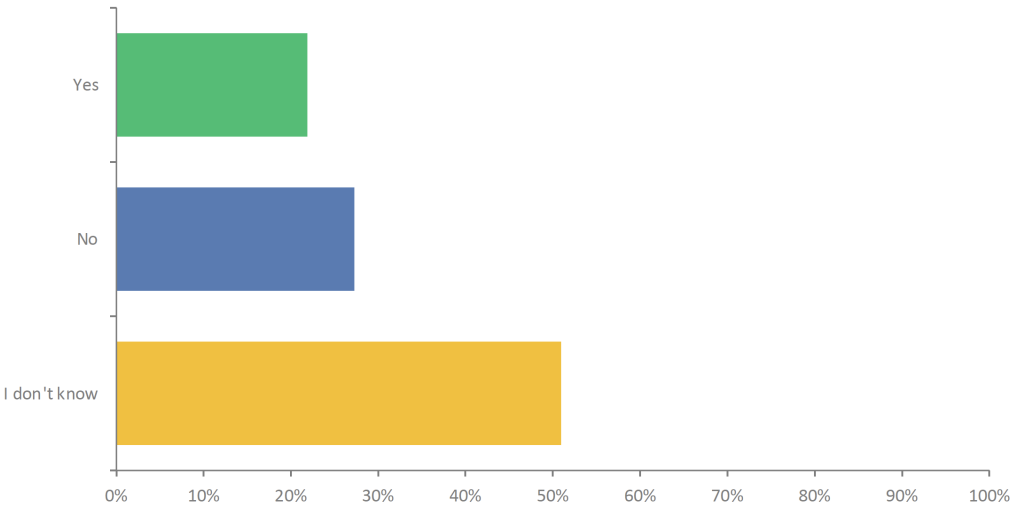
Q12: How safe do you personally feel in your current accommodation?

Answered: 1536 ; 17



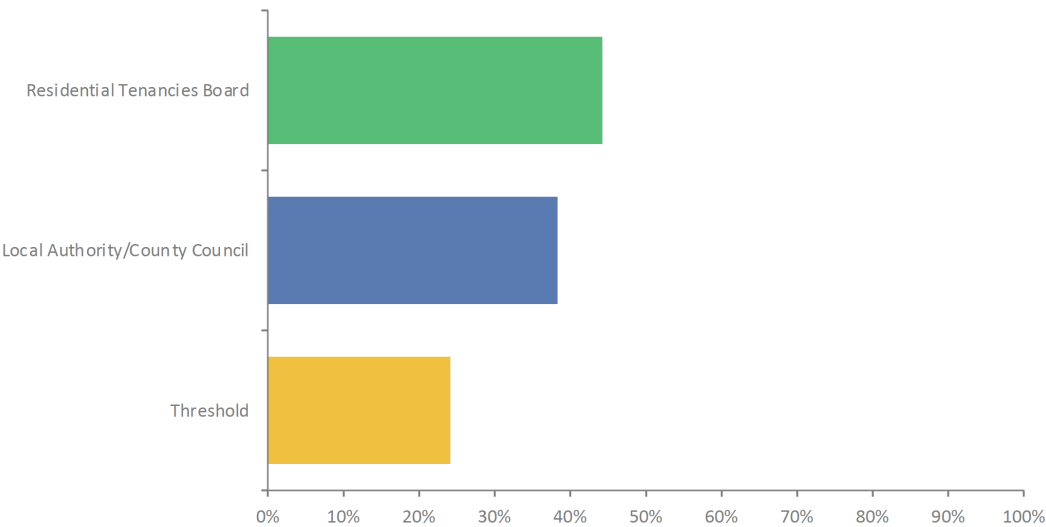
Q13: Is your accommodation registered with the RTB (Rental Tenancy Board?)

Answered: 1518 ; 35



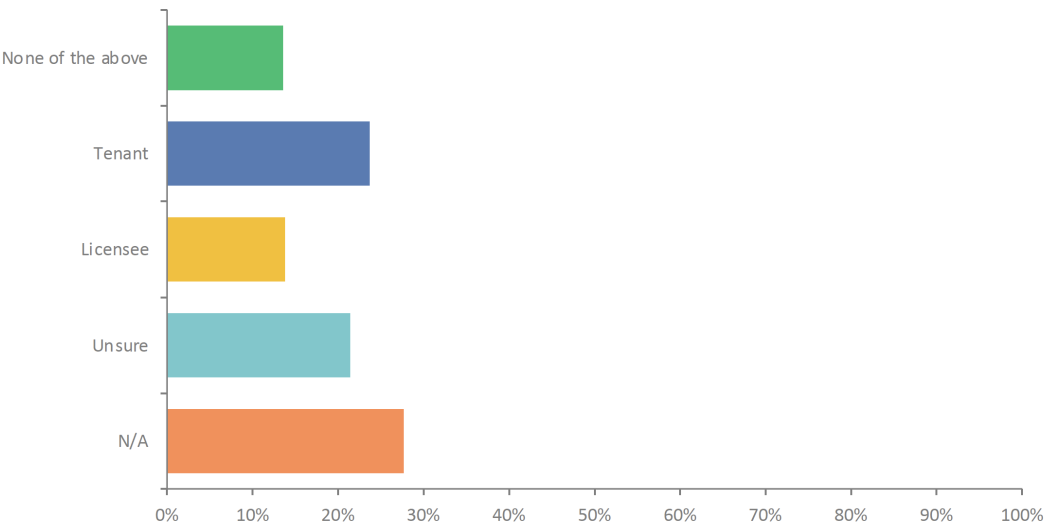
Q14: As a UCD student have you had any personal experience, regarding your accommodation, with the units below? (please tick all that apply)

Answered: 572 Skipped: 981



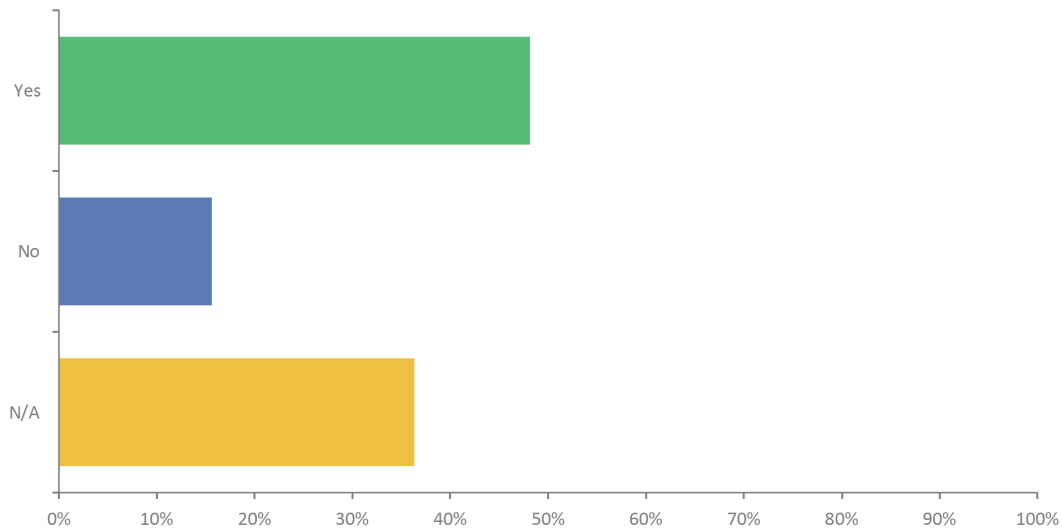
Q15: If in rented accommodation, are you a tenant or a licensee?

Answered: 1446 ; 107



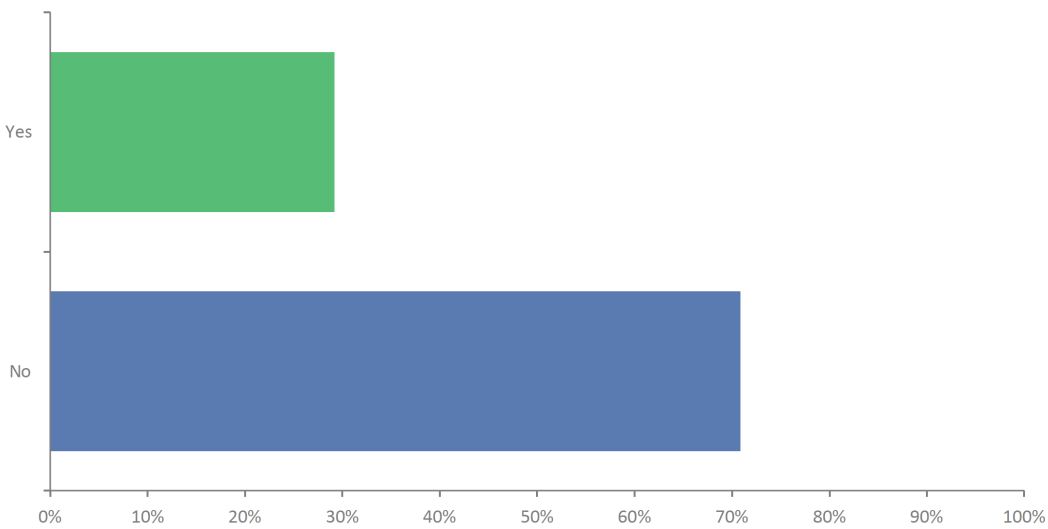
Q16: If you are renting, do you have some form of written agreement which details the terms and conditions?

Answered: 1455 ,: 98



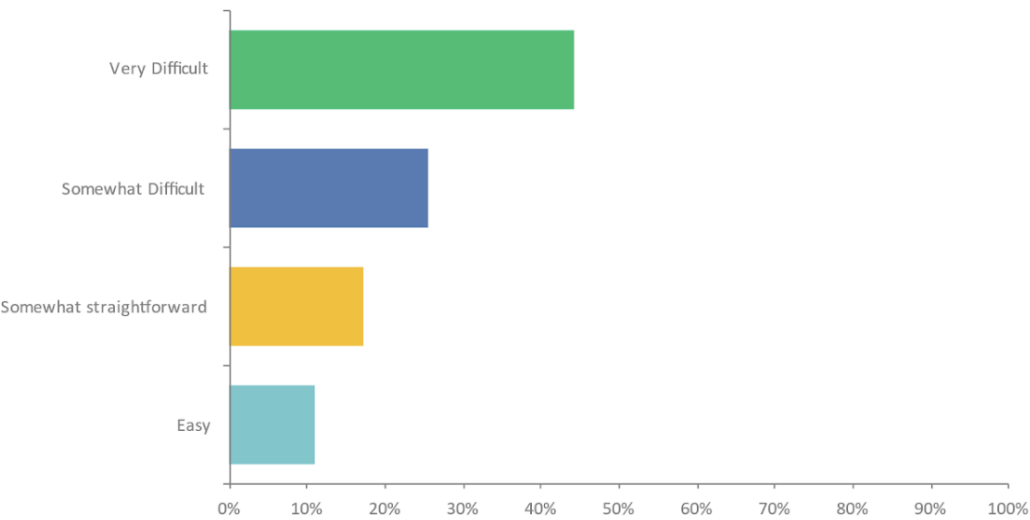
Q17: Are you aware of legal differences between tenant and licensee?

Answered: 1495 ,: 58



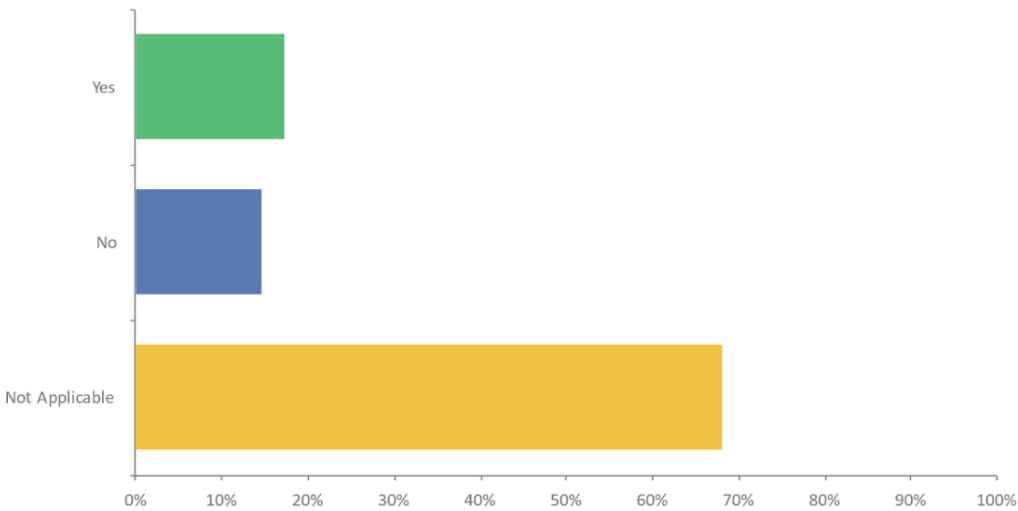
Q18: How difficult was the process of finding accommodation in Dublin? If possible, please briefly describe the process, and the main issues that you had.

Answered: 1372 ; 181



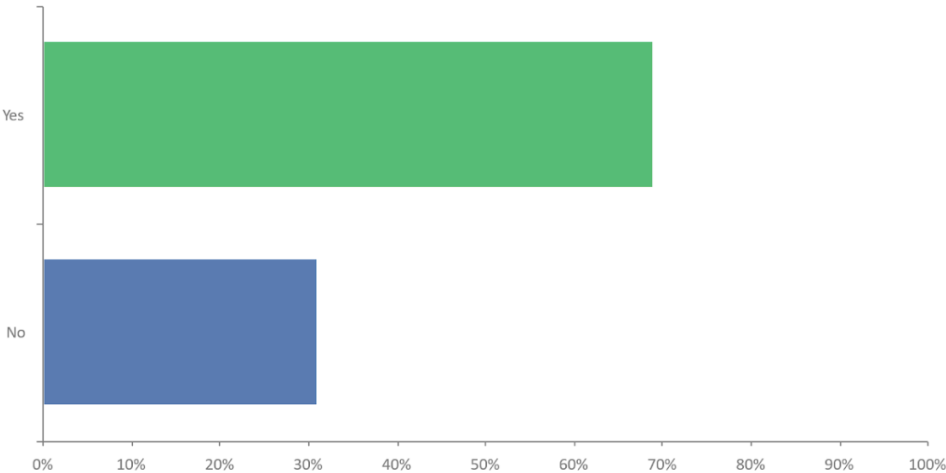
Q19: If you are living in digs-style accommodation, have you encountered any issues during your stay? If so, can you describe some issues you encountered?

Answered: 1427 ; 126



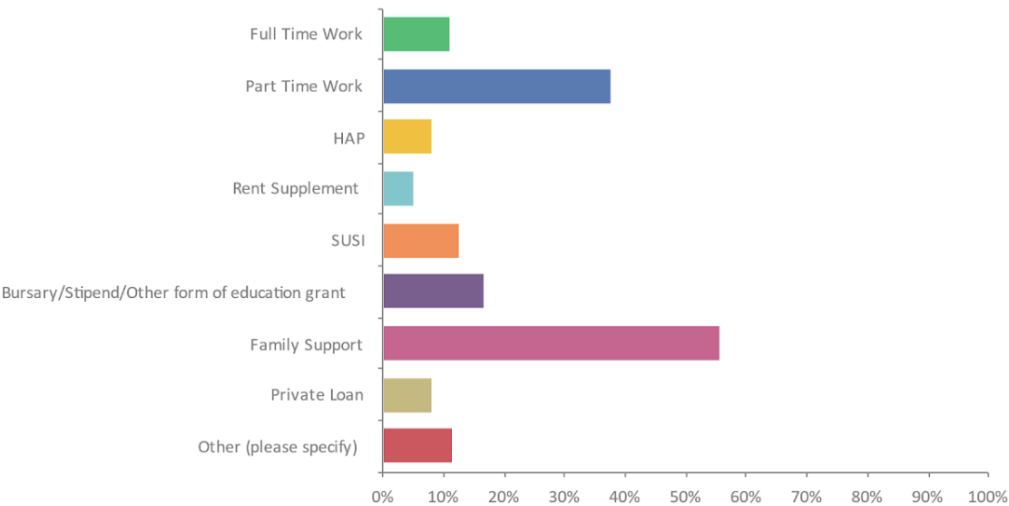
Q20: Are you satisfied with your accommodation? If not, why?

Answered: 1493 ,: 60



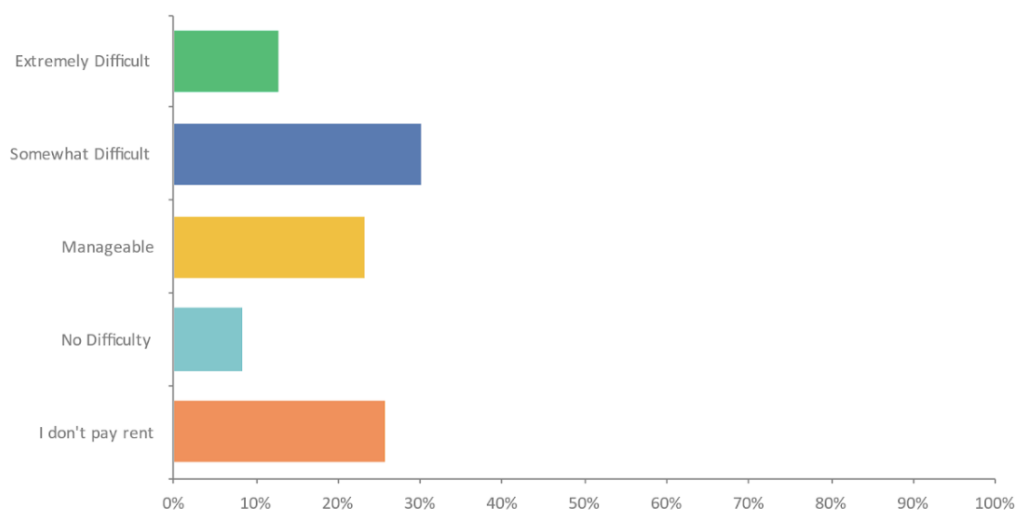
Q21: I pay my rent through (select all that apply)

Answered: 1354 ,: 199



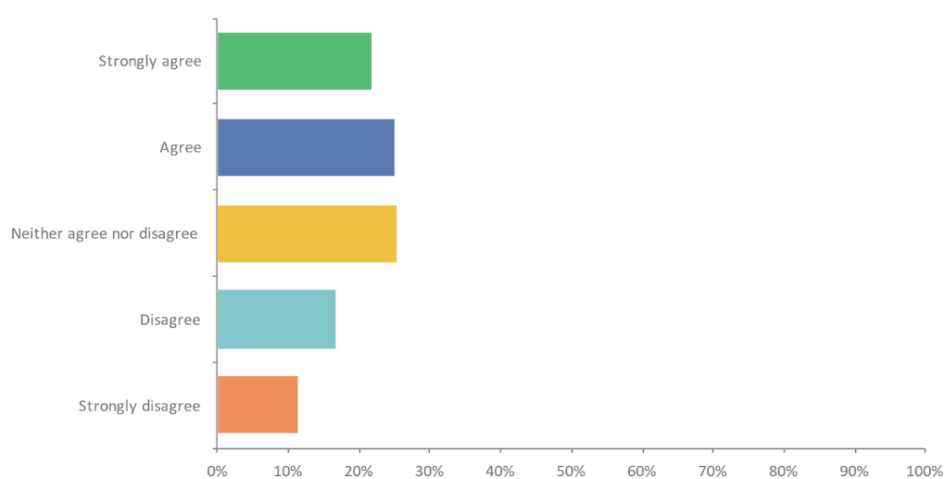
Q22: I find paying my rent monthly to be...

Answered: 1494 ; 59



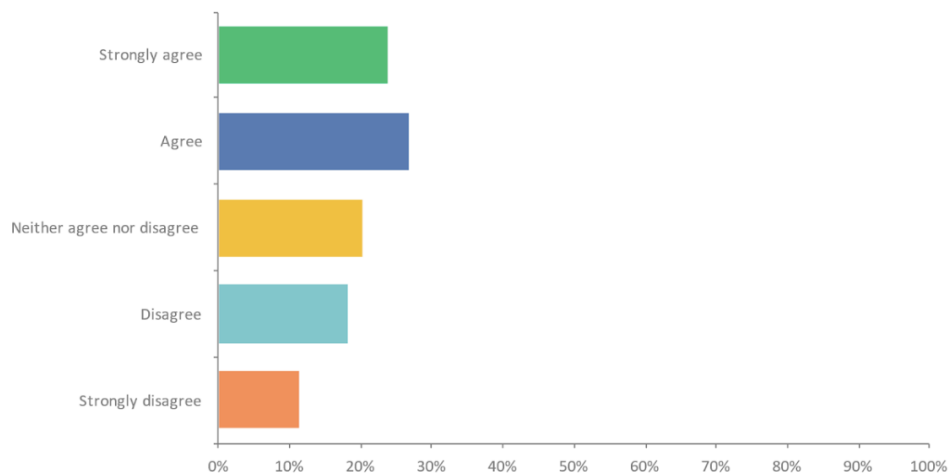
Q23: 'Finding accommodation/ my current accommodation has had a negative impact on my education'.

Answered: 1494 ; 59



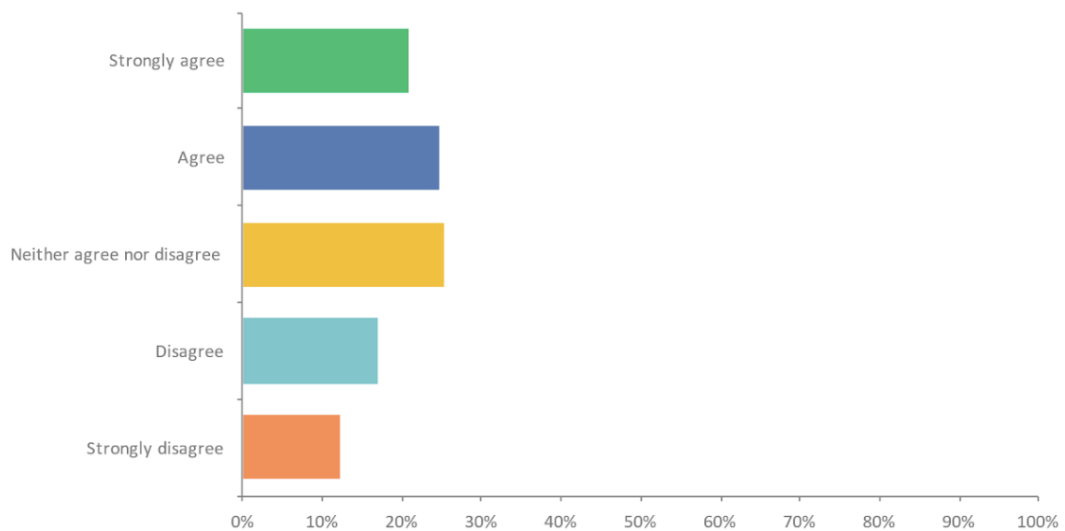
Q25: 'Finding accommodation/my current accommodation is having a negative impact on my student experience'.

Answered: 1493 ; 60



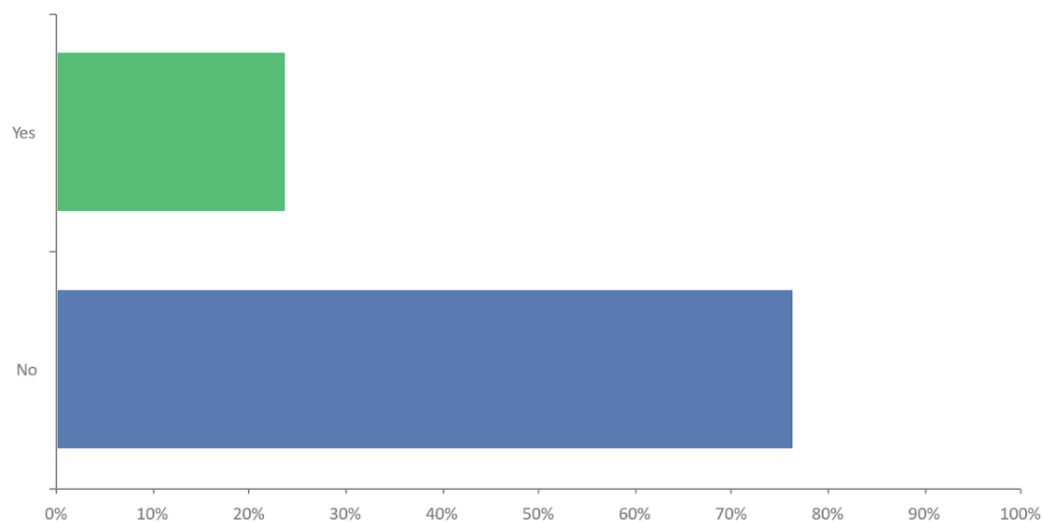
Q27: 'Finding accommodation/ my current accommodation has had a negative impact on my mental health'.

Answered: 1482 ; 71



Q29: Have you been a victim of, or encountered any scams/fraud in respect of your search for accommodation?

Answered: 1482 ,; 71



Affordability and Availability

Out of 1,553 respondents, 998 of them are not currently living with parents or in their own home. In order to hone in on what it costs for students to rent during their college years, other responses, (“I live at home with parent or guardian” and “I own my own home”) have been filtered out in this section.

Our data suggests a noticeable drop off in UCD students living in the private rental sector (-7.53%) between December 2021 and December 2022, matched by an almost identical and noticeable jump in UCD students staying in digs-style accommodation (+7.41%). Students living in digs have a unique story of their own to tell. They will require their own bespoke measures to be taken by those in power and this is detailed in the next section of the report.

While there is not as much of a jump in overall prices paid between 2021 and 2022, it is hard to imagine that prices could have gone much higher. Based on our interactions with our members, even the students who were in a position to pay significant amounts of money simply could not compete with members of the workforce also struggling to find a place to live.

Our 2021 survey made national headlines following the revelation that up to 2/3 of UCD students pay more than €750 per month for their accommodation. The results for 2022 show no improvement whatsoever and make for grim reading for UCD students and their families. Considering that a recent HEA study into the cost of living for students suggested that the average monthly rent for students in Ireland is €469 per month, our findings reveal that for most UCD students, the cost is far greater.



Table 1

	2021		2022	
TOTAL RESPONDENTS - LIVE AT HOME + OWN THEIR HOME	823		998	
TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION				
DIGS	61	7.41%	132	13.23%
PRIVATE STUDENT ACCOM OFF CAMPUS	39	4.74%	109	10.92%
STUDENT ACCOM ON CAMPUS	406	49.33%	416	41.68%
PRIVATE RENTED ACCOM	297	36.09%	285	28.56%
TEMPORARY ACCOM	8	0.97%	23	2.30%
OTHER	18	2.19%	33	3.31%
UNDER €400 ¹	45	5.47%	67	6.71%
€400-€500	49	5.95%	93	9.32%
€500-€650	122	14.82%	109	10.92%
€650-€750	89	10.81%	76	7.62%
€750-€900	199	24.18%	269	26.95%
€900-€1150	203	24.67%	211	21.14%
€1150-€1300	84	10.21%	120	12.02%
€1350-€1500	19	2.31%	18	1.80%
€1500+	13	1.58%	32	3.21%
SKIPPED	0		3	0.30%

Digs and Rights

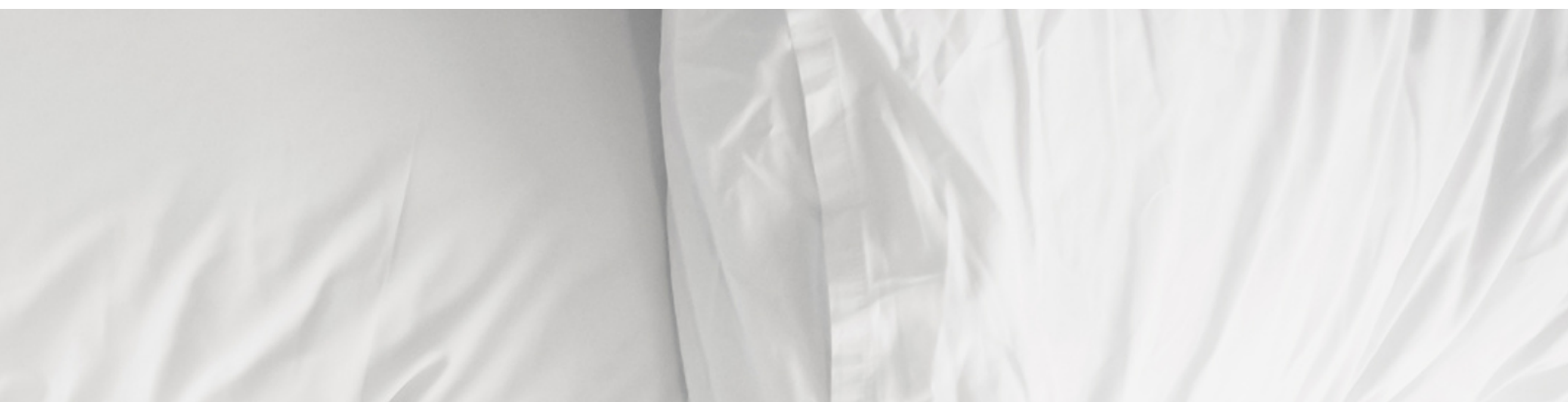
In Q.19 we asked respondents “If you are living in digs-style accommodation, have you encountered any issues during your stay? If so, can you describe some issues you encountered?” More students identified as living in Digs-style accommodation (453) than in Q.4. So while we initially thought that around 13% of respondents were categorised as such, it could be as high as 32%. This corresponds to our exploration into student awareness of their rights and entitlements. In Q.17, 71% of respondents claimed to not know the legal difference between ‘tenant’ and ‘licencee’, the latter of which makes up the bulk of digs-style arrangements. While this is somewhat lower than the 2021 figure (87%), it still speaks to an information gap. It is understandably difficult for students to contemplate their rights (or lack thereof) when the sole focus is on getting in-situ before the start of term. This is backed up by our research into the impact of the crisis on the pursuit of education later on in this report.



Last summer, with the situation long past breaking point, our Sabbatical Officers took to the streets of Dublin City during rush hour to spread the word about the severity of the situation. We also partnered with the University to deliver around 10,000 leaflets to homes with relatively decent transport access to UCD. Our ‘Digs Drive’ garnered a significant amount of local and national media coverage and kept the student accommodation issue at the top of the news cycle for almost a week. This campaign garnered around 400 extra beds for students and while welcome, was really only a drop in the ocean in terms of what was needed, as evidenced by the vast number of students who came to us in the following months seeking assistance. What was perhaps of more value was the attention that it drew to the plight of students and young people in pursuit of an education and the failure of successive governments to provide them with the accommodation that they need.

We were keen to highlight that as grateful as we were to people opening their homes to students, this scenario really is usually the last resort for students and the reality of this arrangement often has negative impacts on their ability to engage with their degrees and student life as a whole. With the likelihood being that this will continue at least for the next academic year, the Government simply must do more to shape the student-homeowner relationship.

This is not to say that there have not been homeowners who have treated this arrangement (in which they clearly have power over the student) with the respect and understanding that it requires, but with this arrangement becoming a mainstay of the higher education sector, students deserve much more certainty and better than the 'luck of the draw' experience that they faced at the beginning of this Academic Year. Below is a short summary of the problems fuelled by ambiguity that all too often shapes this arrangement and a snapshot of the unacceptable problems of access to facilities some UCD students have faced. This section ends with some contributions from respondents to the 2022/23 survey.



Ambiguity caused by lack of regulation

The lack of regulation in digs-style arrangements has sadly led to some undesirable outcomes for UCD students over the last 12 months. In some cases, the student-homeowner relationship started off promisingly but deteriorated, perhaps because the novelty on the part of the homeowner had worn off. When the homeowner's perspective on the arrangement changes, the student in-situ typically must accept it or pack their bags. One student spoke of initially being allowed a level of access, such as being able to do laundry on the premises but then the owner reneged unexpectedly. The same student said that dinners initially provided became smaller with more filler food (bread, rice) and less protein. Another respondent told of how they cannot settle down because they do not know if the landlord will change their mind and evict them. One respondent revealed how they had to move out unexpectedly because the homeowner saw an opportunity to make more money from short-term lets. Some more extreme examples suggest that this absence of regulation saw students unable to enjoy basic boundaries and encounter problems relating to their own privacy and personal security.

Access denied

In the absence of a minimum level of access determined by meaningful regulation of digs, UCD students will continue to be at risk of being denied a level of basic facilities use that threatens to undermine their pursuit of education and ability to get what they can out of college life. Basic access to the premises was denied to students in a number of ways. Some students had to be home by a certain time in the evening, whereas others were not allowed to get up or use the shower before a certain time. Respondents attested to this making them feel “infantilised” or “like a burden”. One 20 year-old respondent said that it felt like a “pseudo-curfew”.

“Lived in digs at beginning of year – was not allowed access to kitchen and rent prices were changed without notifying me first. Not treated like a person but a burden.”

While we tried to mitigate this by drafting a template agreement for homeowners and students, the lack of protections for students in digs requires urgent attention from the Government. Homeowners have only been told about the financial benefits to them under the Rent a Room Relief Scheme and this has arguably fuelled arrangements where homeowners feel that it is appropriate to charge a weekly rate for four or five days out of seven, with some UCD students worryingly having nowhere to go between Friday morning and Sunday evening. The rates being charged to UCD students rival and often exceed the price for traditional rentals with conditions like curfews, limited kitchen access, limited access to laundry and timed showers.

“I was provided with very little space in the fridge and cabinets which made it difficult to plan meals. The owner would go into my room when I wasn’t there. Not allowed to have a guest over. No access to living room. Expensive for what it is. You pay the same as if it were a room in a shared apartment but you don’t get to feel at home. I then had to move out because the landlord wanted to rent out the room I was staying in for short term leases for €1200 a month to students coming over to Dublin to study English.”

"Lack of freedom. Contrary owner who changes the household rules on a whim/regularly. Not feeling fully comfortable at times."

"There are various rules in the house like, No entry after 9pm, No cooking after 10pm, take quick showers and use washroom less and many more."

"(I) can't lock my own bedroom."

"I cannot settle because I don't know if the landlord will change her mind and evict me. I have less space in the communal area and have to do everything the way the landlord wants so I feel second class and infantilised."

"The main issue that I have run into is that the family has a rule that, after 8:30PM, it is quiet time. This means that I can't take a shower or use the kitchen after 8:30PM. It's not the worst thing in the world, but it's created a pseudo-curfew for a 20 year old college student."

"(I) Must ask for (a) shower every time and cannot shower after 9:30 as landlords have gone to bed and I cannot turn on the hot water myself. Showers are also only hot for 15 minutes which has to cover myself and another students shower. Landlord backtracked on the agreement that I wouldn't (need to) pay over Christmas. Landlord also left me alone in the house without heat for a week without telling me what was happening and who would be coming in to the house as a family neighbour came in in the evenings to feed the pet which I didn't know would be happening. Constant questioning of when I'd be leaving and coming back and where I would be going. Front door was also faulty and the key regularly didn't work. Landlord entered the room everyday when I was away. There was no lock on the door. Bedroom window couldn't be opened after 9:30 as they set the house alarm."

"We were once told that we might have to vacate the place because we have more stuff (which is basically our few everyday need utensils since we try to cook instead of purchasing from outside). This accommodation was supposed to be permanent but since it's not on contract so nothing can be said."

Commuting and Transport

Although the objective of this report is to highlight the damage done by failed housing policies, reliable transport is a related issue and is paramount for students, particularly those who do not have access to a car, or for a variety of reasons cannot cycle or drive. Shorter commute times contribute to a student's overall quality of life, academic success, and ability to fully participate in campus life.

Table
2

TOTAL TIME SPENT COMMUTING TO UCD PER DAY		
0-30 Minutes	222	19.58%
30 mins - 1 hour	356	31.39%
1 hour - 2 hours	291	25.66%
2 - 3 hours	137	12.08%
3 - 4 hours	78	6.88%
Over 4 hours	50	4.41%
MOST COMMON MEANS OF TRAVELLING TO UCD		
Public transport	644	56.64%
Car	176	15.48%
Bike	177	15.57%
On foot	134	11.79%
Other	6	0.53%

A total of 1,137 of our respondents do not live in on-campus accommodation. Of these, around 22% spend in excess of 2 hours per day getting to and from campus, with around 4% of respondents admitting to spending over 4 hours commuting to and from college. While many UCD students live relatively close to campus, many others experience a level of unreliability that is simply not acceptable. 57% rely on public transport in order to travel and for many, this involves the use of at least two routes. Within this 57%, there are students who avail of private bus services into UCD.

Typically they report a generally reliable but expensive service. The country's public transport system has been underfunded for many years, is riddled with staffing and infrastructure problems and has also fallen foul of a privatisation agenda that has resulted in less accountability. This has fuelled delays, cancellations, and other disruptions that have impacted the ability of UCD students to get to class on time and attend other campus activities. Below are just some of the submissions we received in our 2022 survey.


"I get the 41X from swords to UCD most days which takes 1 hour 45 mins. To come home I have to take two buses, the 39a to town, which is always full and there is always bad traffic, takes about an hour, and then I have to get the 41C back to swords which takes another 1 hour and 45 mins depending on traffic."

"(I) Used to take bus 175 but since it's completely unreliable, had to change to combination of 15 and 17."

"(My) bus is barely consistent making it unreliable. Some days can be rough, especially for the 9ams and 10am classes."

"I take the 17 bus run by Go Ahead. The commute should take 35 minutes but it typically takes nearer 2 hours."

"Generally walk to the bus stop and then there are a number of buses I could take. I used to be able to get to UCD in under 30 minutes but since covid restrictions were lifted its very difficult to get a bus that isn't full in the mornings, so I could be waiting as long as 30 minutes just to be able to get on."



"I take a train from Kildare for about an hour then I take a 40 minute bus to UCD."

"Wouldn't take the bus because it isn't reliable."

"Commuter Rail to Connolly, DART to Sydney Parade followed by a long walk (or occasional Bleeper bike if I'm in a hurry)."

Ultimately, Government moves to make transport for students and the wider public cheaper are welcome but lack ambition and do not go nearly far enough. UCDSU believes that a ramping up in the delivery of suitable and secure roofs for UCD students must be accompanied by a reliable transport service that supports the pursuit of education and the student experience.

IMPACT

For the final part of our interaction with UCD students (Q.23-27), we wanted to learn about the extent of the negative impact that the both the search for, and our members' current accommodation is having on their pursuit of **education**, their overall **student experience** and their **mental health**. Our data suggests that the impact on both education and the student experience is worsening, with the combined 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' responses increasing from 40% to 47% and 47% to 50% respectively between December 2021 and December 2022. While the data suggests that there has been a drop in the impact of the crisis on the mental health of UCD students (57% in December 2021 versus 45% in December 2022), the drop is from an alarmingly high rate. While it is hard to say, this drop may owe to students being in a slightly better state of mind with the Covid-19 pandemic a bit more out sight, may be testament to a growing resilience in managing the crisis or even may owe to the respondents who are relatively happy with their accommodation setup. As indicated by the responses (some of which are included below), these respondents were very open about telling us how lucky they feel when they look at the situations their classmates and friends find themselves in.

We learned that there is a strong overlap between these three areas, demonstrated across hundreds of responses to an invitation to share first-hand experiences with us in Questions 24, 26 and 28. The next sub-sections elaborate on these three areas that we wanted to delve into.



Table 3

		Strongly Agree	%	Agree	%	Neither Agree nor Disagree	%	Disagree	%	Strongly Disagree	%
2022	Respondents										
EDU	1494	326	21,82%	371	24,83%	377	25,23%	261	17,47%	169	11,31%
S.E.	1493	353	23,64%	399	26,72%	301	20,16%	270	18,08%	170	11,39%
M.H.	1482	307	20,72%	367	24,76%	376	25,37%	250	16,87%	182	12,28%

		Strongly Agree	%	Agree	%	Neither Agree nor Disagree	%	Disagree	%	Strongly Disagree	%
2021	Respondents										
EDU	822	135	16,42%	196	23,84%	240	29,20%	196	23,84%	56	6,81%
S.E.	821	161	19,61%	228	27,77%	154	18,76%	198	24,12%	80	9,74%
M.H.	822	159	19,34%	307	37,35%	94	11,44%	193	23,48%	69	8,39%



EDUCATION

Our primary reason for existing as an organisation is to advocate for education as a universal public good and to support UCD students in their drive to develop skills and expertise that will enable them to pursue their chosen life path. Higher Education is also something that Ireland has placed great importance on, yet more and more people make it through college in spite of rather than due to the current system and its available supports. It is becoming more and more evident that the lack of response to the student accommodation crisis is making this harder for UCD students to do.



In particular, the pressure felt at the beginning of the year is something that several respondents told us. The now annual panic to get settled in a dwelling forces students to neglect their studies and ultimately have to play catch up.



When they do get a place, it is often not fit-for-purpose and it is usually at a hefty financial cost to them and their families. For some UCD students, this financial burden instils a sense of guilt.



Students who come to study at UCD from abroad add so much value to the UCD community but all too often they arrive here with no forewarning of how bad the situation is.



Whether they were born in Ireland or come from abroad, students also feel let down by both the State and by the University, with a number of testimonies revealing that students feel there is a real apathy out there when they try to seek meaningful help.

"Until my housing situation was dealt with, it was impossible to do ANYTHING. And I'm not going to lie, my rent is expensive enough that I am acutely aware of how much money I have at any given point and so I purposely take on as much paid work as I can find. My supervisor would prefer I (do) not, but..."

"If I didn't have to travel for as long as I do in the morning/evening, I'd have more time to be productive, and staying back in the library isn't an option all the time as I have to leave aside at least an hour and a half to get home, and I never want to leave it too late, especially with the dark winter nights on my own."

"The amount of time it took to find accommodation (searching for rooms, sending emails, phone calls, attending viewings) and the stress associated with it meant I was not able to focus on my studies for the duration of the search."

"There is constant guilt about asking my parents for money every month for rent. Especially when it is double the amount I was told I should be paying."

"For a month I had to change 4 short term accommodation just because I didn't have any other option. When I had college and during that period I had a quiz which had 30% grade I couldn't read because of continuous shifting from one place to another and was totally fucked up where I was not able to cook nor eat. Was mentally disturbed."

"The accommodation situation in Dublin is so bad that I am starting to really regret coming here. And I feel that if I can't find somewhere nice, quiet and where I can be productive next term, then I may have to take leave of absence from my degree. It is not good enough."

"It impacts my studies as I have to choose between going to buy my dinner or pay my rent which then impacts my academics."

"I've been lucky enough to get on campus accommodation, removing the stress of a commute which has overall helped my education."

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

It has perhaps become a phrase that is thrown around too easily, but the concept of the student experience is something that UCDSU believes is still worth advocating for. It is supposed to encompass all aspects of college life from the academic to the social, and from the priming for one's future to the supports available along the way. It is all too clear that UCD and indeed other Higher Education Institutions in Ireland have student bodies experiencing a two-tier student experience.

Personal interactions, sense of belonging and the ability to participate have been crippled by the student strand of the housing crisis. Accommodation is the elephant in the room in practically every university committee and the shortage is no doubt felt by every UCD society and sports club too. Testimonies on this question reveal the challenge that UCD students face when trying to have a meaningful college experience that extends past the academic side.

"It has a significant impact. I was very surprised that a university as UCD wouldn't have the necessary infrastructure for its PhD students, researchers and their family. A global University should be aware that people are many times moving their whole lives to a new country and its necessary to offer in campus accommodation for this period (the full 3-4 years)."

"Can't go out unless I stay with friends and I feel like a burden."

"I am always very stressed and nervous about my housing situation due to which I cannot enjoy the student experience or hanging out in societies like my peers do."

"It's harder getting involved in clubs and societies when I have to commute over an hour, especially the ones later in the evening/night."

"I have struggled to make friends because I live so far away and have very little flexibility or spontaneity. Because I spend so much time travelling I also haven't been able to join any clubs or groups where I live, so it's very lonely."

"Thankfully I am on campus so I honestly have the ideal student experience."

"Rent is very high so i have very little expendable cash to go to social events and heaven forbid I'd like to enjoy a drink. Because i have to drive 90km everyday I can never go on a night out without the need to arrange for a place to stay well in advance."

"I simply do not have any student experience apart from my classes. I joined a few societies at the beginning of the year but between the fact that Blackrock is far from UCD Belfield, that UCD Belfield is far from the city center, that my accommodation is far from both campus, and that I am a graduate student, I do not have time to enjoy student life. I cannot even attend some workshops because of the commute."

"Element of surviving and not living."

MENTAL HEALTH

The shortage of affordable housing has led to a situation where many students are forced to live in cramped and overcrowded conditions, often with multiple roommates, in properties that fail to meet the most basic safety and hygiene standards. Students who do have a roof also find not knowing whether they will have their place long term to be a huge source of anxiety.

Whether on or off campus, the high cost of rent and other living expenses such as tuition fees are also contributing to financial stress which compounds matters for UCD students. Many of our members must work long hours in addition to their studies in order to make ends meet, which understandably has a negative impact on academic performance and overall wellbeing. Through the stories shared by respondents, we truly see how issues relating to academic, student life outside the classroom and the mental health of UCD student are all interconnected and regrettably, are all hindered by the student accommodation crisis.

"I'm in a constant stress of how I will make enough to pay for the coming month bills. I haven't had a 3hrs deep sleep in two months, constantly waking up, unable to focus and feeling helpless at times."

"The short term stress before finding accommodation was extreme. I was filled with anxiety and panic that I wouldn't even be able to take up my place at UCD for year 2 because classes were in person and I was not confident I'd find somewhere to live."

I had panic attacks and anxiety when looking for my accommodation (because of the lack of available rooms and the rent). Plus, I only have my accommodation until next June and my classes end in August, which means I have to find another accommodation for Summer 2023, and it is already stressing me out."

"The risk of being homeless due to landlords selling rented spaces or putting rented spaces up for sale is incredibly significant."

"Not knowing where I'm going to be staying next year is a huge source of anxiety."

"Finding accommodation has made me so anxious and feel hopeless. I have tried every Avenue and have gotten little to no replies. It has made me very tense and worry about money constantly. I feel as though I'm too young to be worrying constantly about my financial position. Working for free in placement also means I have to work extra days to make enough money to live and pay rent. That could mean working up to 5 12hr shifts a week and only getting paid for two of them. This has led me to be admitted to and A&E department with exhaustion."

"I feel so hopeless about the housing crisis. Living in a studio has been so depressing, I can't have people over because there is nowhere to sit or hang out. Everything is in the one room and I have nowhere to relax in the evening except my bed. I also have no savings because I'm basically living paycheck to paycheck."

"Stress as an international student. Not much info at the beginning or in advance given by UCD. Anxiety, lack of belonging."

"Not being able to have a stable accommodation for my stay in Dublin is really stressful. If my dig is not available next year I might not be able to finish my degree."

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Appendix One: 2022 Student Accommodation Survey Questions

full data set available upon request

1. What is your current year of study?
2. Which UCD College do you belong to?
3. Gender: How do you identify?

4. What is the type of accommodation you are living in?
5. What facilities are available within your accommodation?
6. What is the TOTAL amount of time you spend commuting to UCD per day?
7. What is your most common means of travelling to UCD?
8. If you take public transport to UCD, please provide details of your journey/combination of Bus Route number(s) or service (LUAS, DART, on foot, private operator) used.
9. If you rely on public transport as your primary means of getting to UCD, how would you rate the reliability of it?
10. How much are you paying monthly?
11. Do you live in a single room or shared room?
12. How safe do you personally feel in your current accommodation?
13. Is your accommodation registered with the RTB (Rental Tenancy Board)?
14. As a UCD student have you had any personal experience, regarding your accommodation, with the units below? (please tick all that apply)
15. If in rented accommodation, are you a tenant or a licensee?
16. If you are renting, do you have some form of written agreement which details the terms and conditions?
17. Are you aware of legal differences between tenant and licensee?
18. How difficult was the process of finding accommodation in Dublin? If possible, please briefly describe the process, and the main issues that you had.
19. If you are living in digs-style accommodation, have you encountered any issues during your stay? If so, can you describe some issues you encountered?
20. Are you satisfied with your accommodation? If not, why?
21. I pay my rent through (select all that apply)
22. I find paying my rent monthly to be...
23. 'Finding accommodation/ my current accommodation has had a negative impact on my education'.
24. Please feel free to share any comments relevant to your education
25. 'Finding accommodation/my current accommodation is having a negative impact on my student experience'.
26. Please feel free to share any comments relevant to your student experience
27. 'Finding accommodation/ my current accommodation has had a negative impact on my mental health'.
28. Please feel free to share any comments relevant to your mental health
29. Have you been a victim of, or encountered any scams/fraud in respect of your search for accommodation?
30. If so, please share whatever information you feel comfortable with
31. What actions would you like to see the government take in order to combat the student housing crisis?
32. What actions would you like to see the UCDSU take in a campaign regarding the student housing crisis?

33. Thank you for your response. If you would like to be entered into a draw to win aOne4All voucher, please provide your UCD email below.
34. Would you like to be added to the UCDSU mailing list to keep up to date on our actions in tackling the accommodation crisis? If so, please add your email in the comment section below.

Appendix Two: 2021 Student Accommodation Survey Questions

full data set available upon request

1. What is the type of accommodation you are living in?
2. What facilities are available within your accommodation?
3. How long is the commute to UCD from your accommodation?
4. How much are you paying monthly?
5. Do you live in a single room or shared room?
6. Is your accommodation registered with the RTB (Rental Tenancy Board)?
7. Have you had any personal experience with the Residential Tenancy Board, Dublin City Council, Dun Laoghaire–Rathdown Council, or Threshold regarding tenant rights?
8. Are you a tenant or a licensee?
9. Are you aware of legal differences between tenant and licensee?
10. How difficult was the process of finding accommodation in Dublin? If possible, please briefly describe the process, and the main issues that you had.
11. If you are living in digs-style accommodation, have you encountered any issues during your stay? If so, can you describe some issues you encountered?
12. Are you satisfied with your accommodation? If not, why?
13. I pay my rent through...
14. I find paying my rent monthly to be...
15. 'Finding accommodation/ my current accommodation has had a negative impact on my education'.
16. 'Finding accommodation/my current accommodation is having a negative impact on my student experience'.
17. 'Finding accommodation/ my current accommodation has had a negative impact on my mental health'.
18. What do you feel is the most important issue relating to student accommodation at the moment?
19. What actions would you like to see the government take in order to combat the student housing crisis?
20. What actions would you like to see the UCDSU take in a campaign regarding the student housing crisis?
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21. Thank you for your response. If you would like to be entered into a draw to win aOne4All voucher, please provide your UCD email
22. Would you like to be added to the UCDSU mailing list to keep up to date on our actions in tackling the accommodation crisis? If so, please add your email in the comment section below.



UCD Students' Union

Accommodation Report

2023