

## **Disgrace!: Durham University to Raise Accommodation Costs by 10%**

Although I'm a finalist and don't have a financial investment in the college room prices, the central University has appalled me with their total lack of empathy to students and general disregard toward those paying for decent educational experiences.

The University increasing the cost of College Accommodation rooms by 10% is tone deaf to the situation facing students, a situation they're more than partly responsible for. For years, the University has been expanding in physical size and student population, building on any available land and practically begging students from the COVID year to defer their offers because they, along with the government, failed to plan appropriately. They consistently increased the number of students living within Durham city, monopolising prices and allowing landlords to also increase prices. Students sleeping in the streets of Durham to secure houses was Durham University's fault, with central management being slow and inept in dealing with the resulting mess. The increase in prices will allow for landlords to justify their own increase in prices, with spiralling affects. The University is at fault due to the continual growth of the student population and proposed plans to build more colleges, as outlined in the 2017-2027 Strategy Plan. It's claimed that the current student numbers from existing colleges will be spread out into the new ones, as to not increase the number of students overall. I don't trust this notion or the University at large and predict the number of students will increase as they can justify this with more University owned beds.

Working class students, like myself, already struggle to afford the costs of Durham, I got extremely lucky with the house I secured in early second year, but many are not this fortunate and either have to budget heavily, possibly sacrificing social elements of university, or work more than they intended and risking impacting their grades. Simply increasing the Durham grant doesn't work, isn't sustainable and is insulting to students as the increase in rent isn't enough with all other increased prices.

To wait this long to release the prices, at the same time as informing returners if they can have a room, in a housing crisis where there aren't enough affordable rooms, is deplorable, and I hope the powers that be know this. They didn't release this information, that they promised they would months ago, because I believe they were scared. Scared of the student backlash with the countless other scandals Durham has faced recently, and scared of the national embarrassment to come with these increased prices. Shame on them. The lack of communication is also ridiculous, and all I'm saying, in anger and disgust, could be categorically wrong, but without any information from the University, all I can think is that they don't want to talk to students because they know they have no defence, other than overhead costs. Waiting until February to release this information, alongside the allocation of College rooms will most likely force returners that don't get a room to frantically search and secure something, increasing stress in an already summative-heavy term. I highly doubt anyone high-up will read something like this, and chances are it'll be refuted in a one sentence response with no substance, but I'm extending an invitation to talk to us and refute the points I've made, and I will eat my own words if I'm wrong, but that is on you to prove, as you've failed thus far, so please do contact us and arrange an interview.

There are many other ways to reduce overhead costs, one being their plans to change the contracts of College Porters, a move which I'm almost certain will have drastic ramifications for the quality of staffing at Colleges and the livelihoods of those students depend on.

I fully support the demands of the student bodies. In this light, I will attend the protest on Palace Green at 13:00 on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, and think we should protect what value we have in our accommodation costs, as this degree of increase from the University will continue to drive up the housing market further, affecting all students for years to come.