



PARSA

ANU postgraduate &
research students'
association

ROOM FOR CHANGE ACCOMMODATION REPORT

FOREWORD

As the President of the ANU Postgraduate and Research Students' Association (PARSA), it is with great concern that I present to you the latest accommodation report. This report exposes the stark realities faced by our postgraduate and research students in the midst of Canberra and Australia's cost of living crisis. Our students, some of the brightest minds in Australia, are grappling with skyrocketing housing costs, substandard living conditions, and ever-shrinking access to affordable accommodation.

In the past several years, Canberra has experienced considerable population growth and the influx of new residents, driving up demand for housing in the region. Combined with inflation, rises in the cost of living and stagnant wage growth, rent and property prices in the ACT have become increasingly unaffordable, placing significant pressure on many Canberrans to keep up with mounting accommodation costs. Students have been particularly affected, with the need to juggle study, work and life creating mounting stress points and making it a struggle to get by.

The in-depth survey conducted by PARSA uncovers the voices of hundreds of postgraduate and research students, demonstrating the adverse personal and professional struggles they face in balancing their academic pursuits with the mounting financial pressures of living in Canberra. It is evident that both on-campus and off-campus housing options are becoming increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible, forcing our students into untenable situations that are detrimental to their overall well-being.

Our report highlights the urgent need for action from the University, the government, and the wider community to address the housing affordability crisis. The insights shared herein demonstrate that without intervention, we risk losing our brightest minds to other universities and depriving many of the opportunity to study in one of the world's finest tertiary institutions. We provide urgent remedial recommendations to facilitate a more stable and conducive environment for student accommodation and study in Canberra.

Tristan Yip
President
ANU Postgraduate and Research
Students' Association (PARSA)

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of housing access and affordability is familiar to postgraduate students. The ANU Postgraduate and Research Student Association (PARSA) have been working on this front since January 2018 as part of the Home Away from Home campaign. In this research effort, we sought to quantify the pressures on students in the market for accommodation.

This year, however, we have surveyed our postgraduate community from another angle. While we explored the issue of housing access and affordability once more, we have taken it a step further to see how this impacts postgraduate students.

Thus, this campaign highlights the rental prices reaching an all-time high and sheds light on the sacrifices students are making to make ends meet. Based on this data, we put forth recommendations aimed at reducing the burden on postgraduate students in an insecure and competitive accommodation market.

In 2023 as we transition into the post-pandemic era, Canberra has recorded the highest rental rate in the country, with three suburbs recording a steep 20 percent or more annual growth rate. This growth is a significant increase. While the rental market across Canberra is not uniform, most of the suburbs across the capital recorded some increase in rent prices.

Similar market pressures exist in the on-campus accommodation market at ANU. Two colleges where many postgraduates reside, namely Bruce Hall (\$500 p/week) and Burgmann College (\$516 p/week), have surpassed \$1000 a fortnight, and many students preferring to live on campus will miss out on placements or be priced out, and forced into the off-campus market.

Add on the ongoing cost of living crisis, and students have had to make significant compromises while studying. Parents and carers have had to choose less suitable and sometimes unsafe accommodation because that was their only option. Students have had to take on additional jobs and reduce their study load to stay afloat when ideally, their studies would have been the priority. Despite an announcement that from 2021 onwards, first-year postgraduates would have guaranteed accommodation, that is yet to happen.

PARSA contends that the promise to ensure accommodation to all first-year postgraduates must be delivered on; that the grants available to postgraduate students are inadequate, and that the emergency options are insufficient. PARSA maintains that postgraduate students' accommodation issues are a constant battle and need long-term solutions.

PARSA has worked hard to gather the necessary data to highlight the direness of this situation through the survey conducted and has consulted with the postgraduate community before reaching out to the university. We call upon the Australian National University to implement the recommendations to ensure that our students' well-being is prioritised. After all, postgraduate years are hard. We do not have to make them harder

Sharrada Segeran
PARSA Equity Officer
ANU Postgraduate and Research
Students' Association (PARSA)

ROOM FOR CHANGE
SUMMARY &
METHODOLOGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents data collected by PARSA between November and December 2022, and analysis of that data, to highlight the challenges postgraduate students face in finding secure and affordable accommodation, both on and off-campus. It seeks to identify the challenges and understand how they impact students as they undertake their studies at the ANU. The authors note the following environment ANU postgraduate students are faced with when seeking accommodation in post-Covid Canberra:

- Since our Home Away from Home survey, post-pandemic Canberra has recorded the highest rental cost increases in the country, up to an annual increase of 20% in some suburbs. On-campus prices have risen accordingly, with some college rates now exceeding \$1000 a fortnight.
- Post-pandemic cost-of-living and inflationary pressures compound the financial burden on students, exacerbating the issues with finding secure accommodation.
- Students are most vulnerable to transient and unsafe accommodation options, and most at risk of homelessness, in the first two months of arriving in Canberra. The authors note that a promise made by the ANU, guaranteeing accommodation for first-year postgraduates from 2021 onwards, was not kept.
- Accessibility issues for disabled students exist both on and off-campus, presenting an urgent role for ANU diversity departments to investigate further and develop solutions.
- Off-campus students are at a disadvantage next to their on-campus counterparts regarding access to support services.
- Parents and Carers are at a disadvantage among post-graduate students. The ANU does not provide on-campus accommodation for this demographic. Securing affordable accommodation off-campus can result in substandard options that may not meet the safety needs of dependent children or be conducive to studying.
- International students are likely to face additional stress in the housing market, compared to domestic students, as they enter a country they are unfamiliar with, sometimes with English as their second language. Without local rental history or referees, these students end up at the bottom of the applications pile in the off-campus market.
- To manage rising costs, students have had to obtain additional jobs, thereby reducing time best spent studying and in some instances, requiring reduced study loads or pausing study altogether.
- PARSA contends that the available grants ANU provides for postgraduate accommodation are inadequate and that current emergency options are insufficient. It calls on the ANU to remedy this situation with a focus on long-term solutions.

Based on the data analysis, several recommendations are made to reduce and relieve the burden on postgraduate students in the face of insecure and unaffordable accommodation. We present this data and analysis to the Australian National University, alongside our recommendations, calling for the university to implement the recommendations promptly and thus prioritise the wellbeing of postgraduate students.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the data collected, respective analysis, and consultations

with postgraduate students, PARSA recommends the following to the ANU:

1. PROVIDE SECURE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR FIRST-YEAR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS.
2. MAKE ON-CAMPUS OPTIONS MORE AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE.
3. ESTABLISH A DEDICATED ACCOMMODATION OFFICER AT THE ANU.
4. PROVIDE FAMILY-FRIENDLY ON-CAMPUS ACCOMMODATION.
5. BETTER COMMUNICATION FROM ANU TO STUDENTS REGARDING ACCOMMODATION .
6. ENSURE CONTINUITY OF EMERGENCY GRANTS.

METHODOLOGY

This report presents data and analysis from a survey PARSA conducted in late 2022, looking into the challenges postgraduate students encounter in securing accommodation while studying at the ANU. PARSA distributed the survey to ANU postgraduate and research students through its emailing list, social media, and word of mouth.

The survey obtained 1719 responses from eligible respondents. Of these, the authors sought to identify the most vulnerable demographics and to demonstrate how these cohorts are at an increased disadvantage in the market for accommodation. The survey is separated into four primary areas of inquiry:

1 Secure Accommodation

The survey asked respondents about finding secure accommodation while undertaking postgraduate studies at the ANU. Respondents were asked what accommodation they had on arriving in Canberra and if they had secure accommodation at the time of surveying. The survey asked how long it had taken to secure accommodation when arriving in Canberra and who else besides themselves did they need accommodation for. Finally, the survey asked respondents where they mainly lived while at ANU – off-campus or on-campus.

3 On-Campus Living

The survey asked respondents who mainly had lived on-campus how satisfied they were with the application process, how satisfied they were with living on-campus regarding a range of factors, how satisfied they were with their physical environment (considering factors such as the size and comfort of the room, accessibility, security, cleanliness, noise levels, availability of social space, and the provision of facilities) and finally, their level of satisfaction with the services provided on-campus.

2 Off-Campus Living

The survey looked separately at off-campus and on-campus accommodation experiences to reflect the differentiated options in the student housing market with their specific advantages and disadvantages. The authors note, however, that they are interdependent regarding pricing, and supply and demand, and that this impacts student's accommodation choices.

For those respondents whose time at ANU has been chiefly living off-campus, the survey asked about their experience. It asked what kind of living arrangement they had secured off-campus and how satisfied they were with the accommodation they had found (based on factors such as the search process, the living experience, and the physical environment). It asked about the main challenges experienced living off-campus, about access to support services, and finally, why they had chosen off-campus living.

4 Affordability

The survey asked respondents how affordability issues impacted their lives, including stress levels, lifestyle, and studies; if they were in paid work; and if so, how many hours. Finally, the survey asked if the respondents felt sufficient financial assistance was available to them.

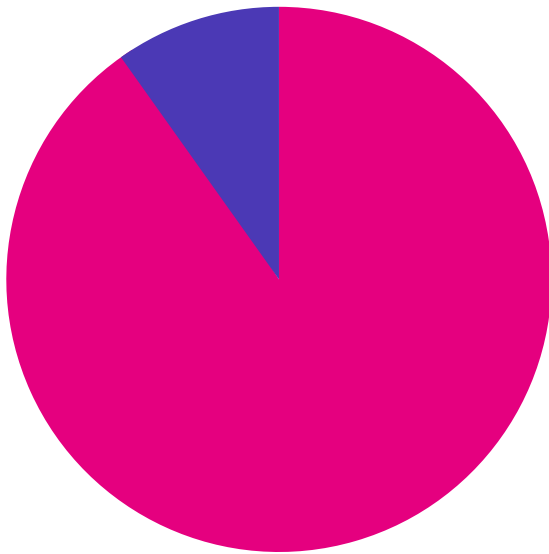
ROOM FOR CHANGE
DEMOGRAPHICS

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 1719 eligible responses to the survey, we sought to understand what percentage of part-time or full time; whether were engaged with course work or Degree by Higher Research (HDR); their age group; their gender/sex; whether they were domestic or international students; and how they identified (for example, as disabled or a parent/carer, etc.).

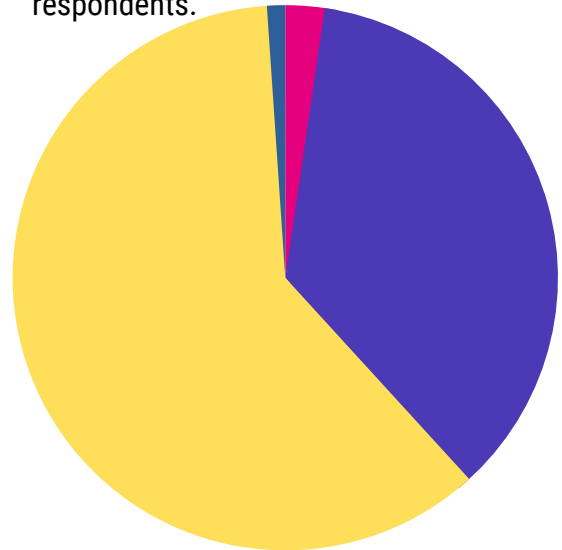
Full-time/Part-time:

- 90.16% (n=1421) of students are full-time students with the remainder 9.84% studying part time (n=155).



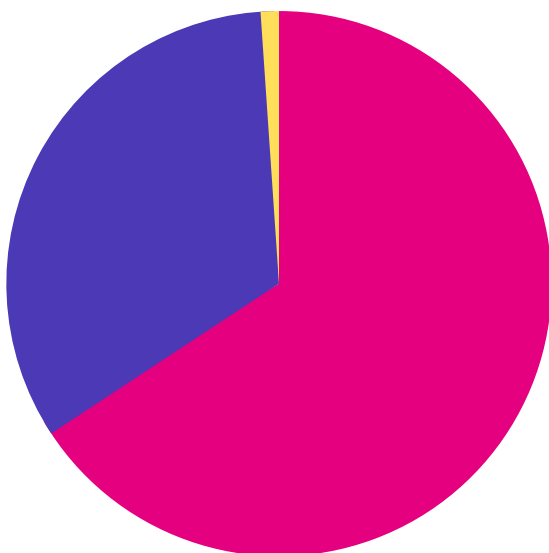
Age:

- Student ages ranged from under 20 (2.86%, n=45) to over 50 (1.33%, n=21). The largest cohort was those between 20 and 24 (44.29%, n=698), while ages 20-29 accounted for 74.89% (n=1196) of respondents.



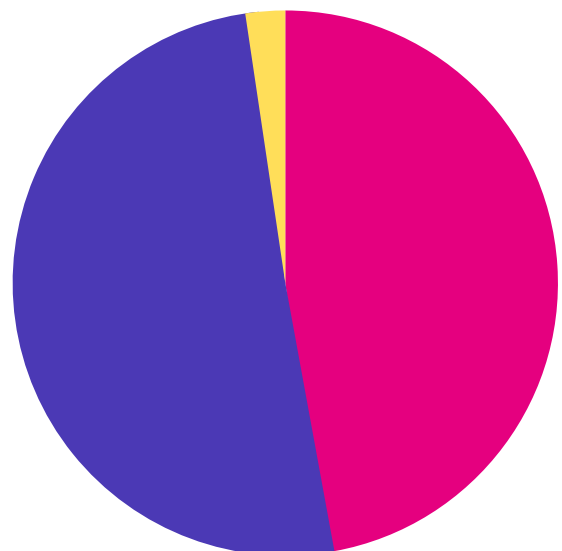
Course of study:

- 65.74% (n=1036) are enrolled as postgraduate coursework students, and 33.19 (n=523) are enrolled as Higher Degree by Research students.
- 1.08% (n=17) ticked 'other', such as doing both or a regular college course.



Gender/Sex:

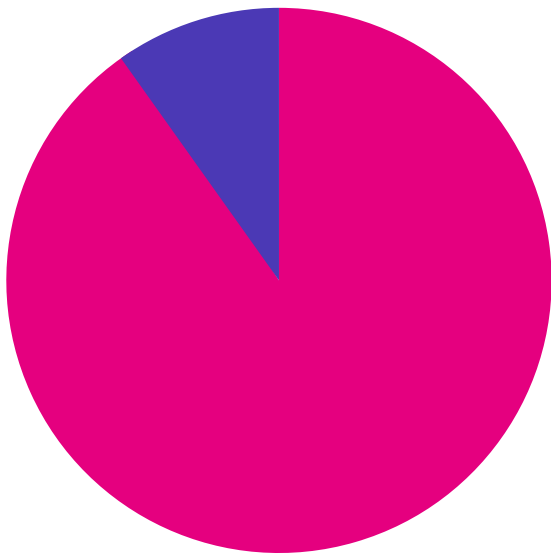
- 47.12% (n=744) of respondents were female.
- 50.54% (n=798) of respondents were male.
- 2.35% (n=37) of respondents were non-binary, gender non-conforming, used other terms, or chose not to answer.



DEMOGRAPHICS

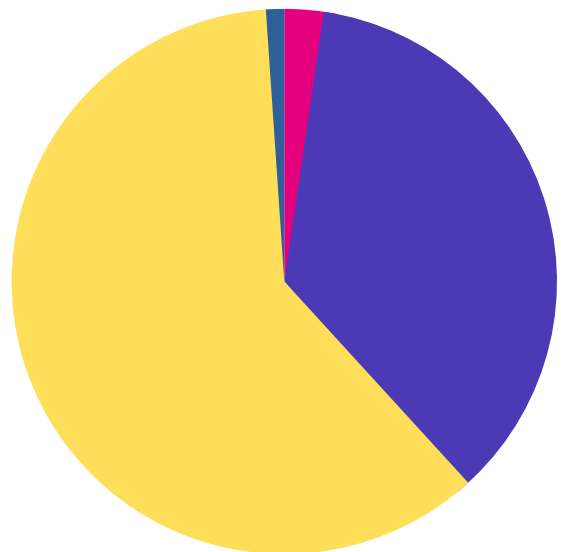
Domestic student/International student:

- 51.34 (n=802) of respondents are domestic students.
- 48.46% of respondents (n=757) are international students
- 0.19% of respondents (n=3) ticked 'other' (for example, a New Zealander who lives in Australia permanently).



Identity:

- 11.46% (n=255) of respondents identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander.
- 24.53% (n=546) of respondents identify as English as a Second Language (ESL) students.
- 16.98% (n=378) of respondents identify as culturally and linguistically diverse.
- 10.02% (n=223) of respondents are parents or carers.
- 4.63% (n=103) identify as LGBTQIA+
- 4.40% (n=98) of respondents have a disability, are neurodiverse and/or have accessibility needs.



90%

Full Time Students

65%

Enrolled as postgraduate coursework students

44%

Between 20 and 24 years old

11%

Identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander.

VULNERABLE DEMOGRAPHICS

While most students will be challenged to secure accommodation in the competitive Canberra market, specific demographics are more disadvantaged. The authors identified those groups most vulnerable to accommodation challenges:

- Students with English as a Second Language (ESL)
- Students with dependents, such as parents and carers
- Disabled students

Students with English as a Second Language (ESL)

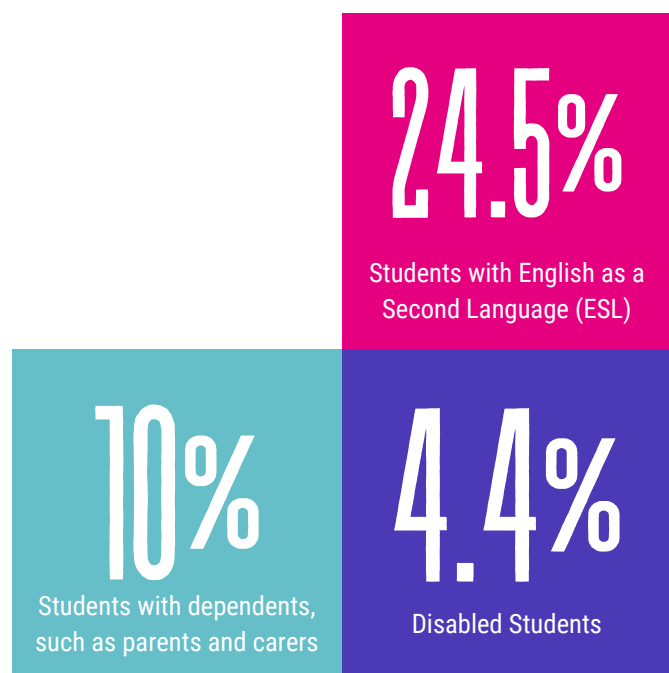
With half of all respondents being international students, a significant number of these have English as their second language (24.5% of the entire sample). These students face unique challenges in the Canberra off-campus accommodation market, where the demand to produce documentation for landlords and agents can be impossible to satisfy. Language barriers aside, these students do not have the local rental history landlords and agents require and cannot compete with local tenants. This challenge is in addition to the high rents that are squeezing students out of the market.

Students with dependents, such as parents and carers

The survey identified 10 % of respondents as students with dependents (dependents being children or a family member they care for). These students are particularly vulnerable as they are looking for accommodation for more than one person, a market where there may be fewer options, more money demanded, and issues such as safety taking a higher prominence. These factors limit the accommodation options for these students and are exacerbated by the lack of family-friendly accommodation on-campus at the ANU.

Disabled Students

4.4% (n=98) of respondents have a disability, are neurodiverse, and/or have accessibility needs. It is difficult enough to secure accommodation, let alone affordable accommodation that meets the accessibility needs of a disabled student. PARSA recommends notifying Departments of Inclusion of any survey findings that illuminate the challenges disabled students encounter in the accommodation market.



ROOM FOR CHANGE
ANALYSIS

SECURE ACCOMMODATION

ANALYSIS

Secure housing is a significant and ongoing issue for postgraduate students at the ANU. In recent years the university sector has expanded substantially, with increased enrolments from overseas students. Unfortunately, the availability of on-campus housing has not grown in accordance. With similar supply pressures in the off-campus rental market, it is more complicated than ever for students to find secure accommodation.

PARSA surveyed postgraduate students to ascertain their challenges finding secure accommodation at ANU. The results paint a troubling picture of two-thirds of students arriving in Canberra without secure accommodation, the near-impossible demands of the off-campus application process, and vulnerable demographics left to substandard and transient housing options.

Looking for secure accommodation while the study year has commenced is not ideal, yet 59% of these students must do exactly that. And while 40% find secure accommodation within the first week, another 32% are still looking up to two months later. Many respondents (6% or 74 students) still seek secure accommodation after two months.

Those students unable to secure accommodation on arrival, necessarily resort to more insecure and transient options, such as Airbnb, hostels, inns, motels, and hotels. Alarming, some are homeless, as reported by nine respondents. The stress of such circumstances is self-evident.

Respondents' reasons for being unable to secure accommodation vary from the unavailability of accommodation, prices being out of the affordability range, difficult-to-satisfy application processes, and communication difficulties with landlords and agents. Many students face multiple rejections of applications, though some cohorts are particularly vulnerable to these challenges.

Such cohorts, like those with dependents, students from overseas, or those with English as their second language, are disadvantaged in a low-supply/high-demand accommodation market and are among those most likely to be in transient or unsafe living conditions.

For example, half of all respondents (49.5%) are overseas students, and half of those have English as a second language (ESL). As such, they do not have a local rental history or referee reports, the documents demanded by landlords and agents. Typically, their applications end up at the bottom of the pile.

Students with dependents are also in a difficult position as the ANU does not provide on-campus accommodation for families. For these students, their only option is the off-campus market. With their lower incomes, and as parents and carers, they face limited choices, putting them at risk of resorting to suboptimal housing, where health and safety issues abound. This vulnerable group accounts for 13.7% of respondents.

In addressing these issues, PARSA calls on the university to develop policies that mitigate the accommodation stresses and challenges faced by postgraduate students at a time when they should be focussing on their studies.

It asks that the university keep an earlier promise to guarantee accommodation for first-year postgraduate students and to create a policy document that explores ways postgraduate students can be supported in the off-campus market.

Policy suggestions include a dedicated accommodation officer at the ANU who assists students with all aspects of finding suitable accommodation. This officer could assist overseas and ESL students in writing and submitting rental applications, providing official referee statements, and in some cases, help negotiate with agents where the student is at a disadvantage due to communication barriers. Additionally, they could negotiate ongoing deals with private agents and provide legal advice and support in the case of unscrupulous agents and landlords.

Another option for the ANU to consider is an increase in the supply of on-campus housing, including options for students with families and/or dependents. Many students are in the off-campus accommodation market only because they did not receive on-campus placement or could not afford the on-campus rent. Addressing the situation where on-campus rents compete with off-campus rents at the expense of the students such accommodation exists for is crucial in solving student accommodation challenges.

In summary, increasing the supply of affordable, on-campus accommodation, and providing administrative and legal support for students in the off-campus accommodation market, especially in the first two months of the student year, would go a significant way to reducing the disadvantage and stress many postgraduate students face in the Canberra accommodation market.

SECURE ACCOMMODATION

ANALYSIS

"On-campus accommodation is for single students or important visiting scholars with families, and if there is something to be found for students with families, it's in such dilapidated/mouldy condition I wouldn't be comfortable housing my child there."

"We found it very difficult to find off-campus accommodation through agents as international students. Since we don't have a reasonable income in the early days of coming to Canberra, our applications were mostly rejected. I would have loved to stay on campus, and it would be very convenient if ANU had more family-friendly accommodations for postgrad students."

"Accommodation policies are making it very difficult for single parents to succeed on every front of their life as a PH.D."

"I had a bad experience with a landlord when I first moved to Canberra in July and ended up having to move out during an intense time of assessments, exams, etc. I did not move into a new place for five weeks having to bounce between different houses of generous friends. It was exhausting. And in finding a new place, it was accepting that I would have to pay more for my well-being and happiness."

"I have been virtually homeless since July of this year, following an incredibly distressing experience with my previous tenancy in a house share. In summary, the landlord unlawfully tried to evict us earlier in the year. We sought legal aid and were able to continue our tenancy until the end of our contract in July. This resulted in the landlord taking us to ACAT to withhold our bond. After a stressful process, the tribunal determined that my co-tenants and I had done nothing wrong, and we received our bond back. Since then, I have been living in various places as an unpaid house/pet sitter in ACT and rural NSW."

"Some rental agents ask postgraduate students on scholarships to provide 3-6 month's rent in advance before taking our application to the landlords. This is extremely exploitative."

Half of the respondents have lived off-campus for most of their time at ANU. While for some students, this is because on-campus housing is unavailable or unaffordable, for others off-campus living is a choice.

Off-campus options vary somewhat, though most students are in private rental accommodation with either family or housemates. A small amount lives in their own home, public or community housing, or more transient options such as house sitting, pet sitting, homestay, or residing on the UC campus.

Off-campus accommodation comes with specific challenges that on-campus students don't encounter, chief amongst which is being left to navigate the highly competitive local rental market with little support.

Other challenges faced by those in the off-campus rental market are:

- Difficulty in finding accommodation close to the university
- Rent bidding
- Dealing with difficult or exploitative agents and landlords
- Difficult application processes
- Rental bonds
- Issues with housemates
- Finding accommodation suitable for families with dependents

The PARSA survey sought to identify the most significant of these challenges. As expected, the results primarily reflect student frustration at the lack of off-campus housing and the accompanying rental prices, with 41% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction.

The onerous nature of the off-campus application process was also reflected in the data, with 31.97% of respondents somewhat to very dissatisfied with this aspect of securing accommodation. Similarly, dealing with rental agents, landlords, and property agents was problematic for 27.2% of respondents.

In such a tight market, landlords and agents have the advantage, and students are expected to jump through several administrative hoops to prove they are responsible tenants and that, despite their generally low incomes, they can afford the rent.

At most disadvantage here are overseas and ESL students. Dealing with an unfamiliar system and being unable to provide the rental histories or referees agents demand, these students will likely have their applications dismissed. One student told of 38 unsuccessful applications out of 40.

Also raised in that data are accessibility issues, with 12.6% of respondents who live off-campus reporting dissatisfaction with the accessibility of their physical environment. While not a large percentage per se, this number represents 89 students, and with the high likelihood that the vast majority of these are drawn from the 98 disabled students surveyed, this presents a statistically significant result that must be brought to the attention of ANU inclusion departments, and those concerned with the welfare of disabled students.

The data also reflected safety as a significant issue. Of the respondents living off-campus, 16% (or 255 students) report being exposed to illegal behaviour and/or exploitation by landlords, agents, or property managers, believe themselves to be living in unsafe environments, or at risk of homelessness. It is unclear which demographics are most vulnerable to these outcomes, but PARSAs flag it to the ANU as a student welfare issue.

The most striking result in the survey of students who live off-campus was that 64% of respondents felt support services were either insufficient or unknown to them. This result presents a clear opportunity for the ANU to improve off-campus student's welfare by providing and messaging the availability of more accessible support services.

What emerges from this data are significant levels of dissatisfaction across the board with off-campus living, from the application process to issues of accessibility and safety. Significantly, two-thirds of students living off-campus felt they had insufficient access to support services. These dissatisfaction levels are likely highest amongst those at the most disadvantage in the market, disabled students, overseas and ESL students, and students with dependents.

While many of these challenges, such as housing unavailability, rental price increases, and rent-bidding, are inherent to the Canberra rental market and beyond the university's control, the data suggests room where the university could mitigate some of the challenges students living off-campus face, starting with improved access to support services.

OFF-CAMPUS

ANALYSIS

As detailed in the section on Secure Accommodation, a dedicated ANU accommodation officer could address many of these issues. As a one-stop shop, support could be provided across a range of matters to the students most at risk in the off-campus market, many from overseas and without English as their first language. Such an office could assist in navigating the demands of the rental application process, aiding with writing applications, providing references, negotiating with agents on the student's behalf, and making sure students understand their rights as tenants.

In addition, such an office could support those students who have been exposed to illegal practices from landlords or agents, are in an unsafe environment, or are at risk of homelessness. Legal support and advice regarding tenancy issues should also be available if possible.

"Finding a house to rent in Canberra with no or very little rental history is extremely difficult. I personally had to apply to literally 100 properties for the second time and 80 properties for the first time when I looked for a sublet. The rights that one is entitled to in a rental accommodation, or a sublet are not known to most of them. I had to take a legal route to understand my case."

"The efforts of seeking off-campus accommodation in Canberra for a couple with a young child were exhausting. Accommodation in Canberra is not friendly for international students with babies/young children. My partner and I took 3-4 months to look for one."

OFF-CAMPUS

ANALYSIS

"I have been trying to secure a rental in Canberra but have had no success to date. A significant challenge is that agencies will not consider my applications as they deem my income too low. With my scholarship and part-time work, my income totals around \$45,000, which is low, but certainly not as low as many others, especially postgraduate students. Recently, I applied for a studio apartment advertised at \$370 per week in Canberra. My application was rejected because the agency stated they do not accept applicants for whom then total rent exceeds 33% of their income"

"I wanted to comment on my observations about international students arriving in Canberra and looking for off-campus accommodation, particularly students with families. I have seen several situations where students have accepted poor quality, over-priced and unsafe accommodation because of the cost of the temporary accommodation and the pressure to find somewhere long-term."

"Some rental options are not suitable. For example, upstairs flats, no off-road parking, very run down, and security concerns. Very hit or miss and stressful – moving around a lot from place to place, living with strangers in their own homes – sometimes I was within a week of having nowhere to live. I have also had to work simply to pay the rent to be at the university to study, creating a circular dilemma/situation where I then had less time to spend on my PhD. Eventually, I went part-time, slowing down/extending my studies. I am considering not returning to Canberra for the rest of my studies because of these difficulties but I am concerned about the impact this could/would have on the completion of my PhD."

Half of the respondents to the survey lived on-campus for most of their time at ANU.

The data shows postgraduate students are generally satisfied with most aspects of living on campus, with dissatisfaction, for the most part being relatively low, typically around 10-12%. These results consider factors such as the ability to sleep and study in their rooms, the social environment, the provision of facilities such as parking and internet, the levels of support, and the degree of privacy.

On these factors alone, the survey suggests a higher degree of satisfaction for those living on-campus, than those off-campus. Even where 16% of respondents on-campus were dissatisfied with the size and comfort of their on-campus room, those off-campus were more so (19%).

The main dissatisfactions for those living on-campus are to do with the rent price and the application process, results supported by qualitative responses. Other concerns flagged in the data are accessibility issues for disabled students and the lack of on-campus accommodation for families.

Approximately a third of on-campus respondents (32.92%) reported dissatisfaction with the price of on-campus rents. While the university has no control over the availability of housing or the asking price in the off-campus market, there is an expectation that the on-campus market for accommodation be subject to policies that work in favour of the demographic they are designed for – students.

PARSA understands that all, if not most, residential halls and colleges on campus were partially privatised in a 2016 concession agreement that saw changes in how on-campus rents were determined. Rather than being determined by the ANU in accordance with student needs, the rents are indexed to inflation to remain attractive to stakeholders.

While concession agreements like this have become common among Australian universities in the past decade, the ANU has the largest one in the country. Consistently and universally aligning on-campus rents with the competitive off-campus market, rather than configured to the demographic they serve, means students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will be locked out of postgraduate university education at the ANU. This has natural consequences for diversity amongst the student population and is something the ANU needs to take seriously.

The second cause for dissatisfaction amongst students is to do with the application process, especially the time students were left waiting for an outcome. Almost a quarter of students (23.6%) registered dissatisfaction with the length of wait, a result supported by qualitative responses. For example, there are stories of students turning up at the commencement of study to a hall or college without having heard whether they were offered a place, then risking being on the back foot in the difficult off-campus market.

Another 14.5% of respondents were dissatisfied with the application form when applying for accommodation on-campus. While this is not an overly high percentage it still represents 129 students of the on-campus sample. Given the high number of ESL students participating in the survey, it would be prudent to understand if this cohort is disadvantaged in the application process and how it could be more accessible to these students.

Accessibility is another concern reflected in the data for on-campus living, with 11.2% of students somewhat to very dissatisfied with the accessibility of their physical environment. This percentage represents 89 students. Given that 98 respondents from the survey have identified as disabled, there is a high likelihood that most disabled students surveyed are represented as those dissatisfied with the accessibility of their physical environment on-campus.

This result compares closely with accessibility issues in the off-campus market (13.6% or 95 students) and concludes that disabled students are disadvantaged across the accommodation market. PARSA urges the ANU to do more research into this area in conjunction with Inclusion departments to ascertain the extent of the issue and what is needed to resolve it, lest disabled students become disenfranchised.

One cohort that remains fully excluded from living on-campus are students with dependents, such as parents or carers. This cohort accounts for 13.5% of respondents, and these are the students most likely to have registered their dissatisfaction in the survey with the lack of availability of family-friendly options on-campus.

Qualitative responses suggest that this is a vulnerable group of students, at a disadvantage in the off-campus market and at risk of living in unhealthy and unsafe environments, especially for children. Providing on-campus accommodation for students with dependents would be the ideal solution for this vulnerable cohort.

ON-CAMPUS

ANALYSIS

Surveyed dissatisfaction with support staff and services on-campus are generally low. This result compares with over two-thirds of off-campus respondents being dissatisfied with their access to support services, pointing to a significant welfare disparity between the two groups.

In summary, PARSA recognises that demand for on-campus housing outstrips supply and forces many students who want to live on-campus into the problematic and competitive local rental market. To this end, PARSA calls on the ANU to increase the supply of on-campus accommodation, including accommodation for students with families, and price this accommodation to reflect the university's obligation to students and commitment to diversity rather than concession profits.

In the meantime, on-campus residences must ensure their application processes and the allocation of on-campus rooms proceeds as efficiently and swiftly as possible. Students who have applied to live on-campus and missed out on a place need adequate time to find alternate accommodation off-campus. The data and qualitative responses tell us that the current time frames and delays add significantly to student stress levels and play their part in the unfortunate outcomes of insecure and unsafe accommodation options, including homelessness.

"I was forced to go to UC accommodation since ANU didn't offer me any, even though I was well on time with my application. I had no place to live when I arrived in the country, aside from being lucky to have friends who were so kind to let me stay until I could find something here. I had to physically go to UC myself to arrange it since the waiting list referral system was also extremely lacking. ANU's communication around accommodation has been horrendous."

"It took a very long time to get a response from ANU accommodations when I was still out of the country. It was very worrying for me as an international student. I got the confirmation only a day before my flight to Canberra."

ON-CAMPUS

ANALYSIS

"It took me too long to wait for the results of the dorm, and it wasn't announced until before school started that I would be able to get the room I wanted. Last Semester I was lucky, but many of my classmates found out about their assignments only a week before school started. They had to find off-campus accommodation at a high cost and on a temporary basis."

"The response time for getting accommodation details was very long, and it was challenging to get the staff to understand the problems faced by students travelling from abroad to reach Canberra to study at ANU."

"International students with children are not supported by ANU for their accommodation needs."

"The number of dormitories is limited, so many students' applications are rejected. Then they can only choose off-campus accommodations. However, as an international student, I find it hard to rent an apartment or a house on some Australian renting apps like Domain and Realestate. We not only need to provide so many documents but also need to translate every document. Even though I spent a lot of time preparing these documents, all my applications were rejected. Most property agents prefer local tenants who have a stable income, while international students are most unwanted. I hope our university can increase the number of dormitories and give international students more help and support."

2022 and 2023 have seen rent increases across the Unilodge portfolio, and the pricing for 2023 is ridiculous. My shoebox studio is increasing to \$375/wk. which is technically out of my current budget, and I've had to find a second part-time job just to be able to afford to stay. Add to that the surcharge they put on top for students staying only the first semester (which I forgot about), and it's all a bit of a slap in the face for being "affordable student accommodation".

"The application process is lengthy and not crystal clear for students. It would be great if there was a hotline for ANU accommodation, where we could call and get clarity whenever there is any issue."

AFFORDABILITY

ANALYSIS

The survey asked respondents how affordability issues impacted their lives, including personal stress levels, lifestyle, studies, if they were in paid work, and if so, how many hours. Finally, the survey asked if the respondents felt sufficient financial assistance was available to them.

Over 60% of respondents reported experiencing stress over affordability issues, with a quarter of respondents (25%) experiencing that stress often or frequently.

The data reports that almost 80% of students have had to adjust aspects of their lives to manage affordability issues as they undertake postgraduate study. For example, taking another job, reducing social life, increasing the hours in paid work, and/or moving further out from the university to find more affordable accommodation. For 10% of students, this has required a reduced study load or time off from university.

PARSA recommends further investigation to identify which students had to reduce study hours or take time off university. Affordability issues that significantly impact a student's life suggest a vulnerable cohort at risk of being excluded from postgraduate study and, thus, suitable targets for increased grants or bursaries.

The most common ways postgraduate students get by financially are with assistance from families (32.76%), scholarships and grants (16.78%), and paid employment (25%). Some students likely rely on various sources, such as part supported by family and part supported through their paid work.

38% of students in paid employment work a full-time week or close to a full-time week. Given that almost all respondents surveyed are full-time students, this presents an issue for the quality of life and the student's capacity to study. More alarming is the 9% of those in paid employment, working more than a full-time week and studying (9% accounting for 46 students).

It is unclear which students work full time or over 40 hours a week or why (beyond affordability issues), but ideally, those students would be identified and targeted for increased financial support.

AFFORDABILITY

ANALYSIS

The paucity of government support for postgraduate students stands out in this data collection, with only 7% of respondents receiving any government support. More government support may exist, and students are unaware, which suggests a role for the university in communicating such information. In any case, the role of the ANU in providing more bursaries and grants to postgraduate students is as important as ever, and PARSA urges the ANU to extend these to more students.

Despite the difficulties facing students, as illustrated by the survey, a surprising majority (79%) remain pragmatic regarding how much the university or government should financially assist them. This demonstrated lack of entitlement lends weight to the data highlighting those under genuine financial stress. In other words, one-fifth of respondents (21%) disagree that they have sufficient financial assistance. Further investigation by the ANU to identify which cohorts are under the most financial pressure should allow the targeting of this group by the university for additional support.

"While I was very lucky to secure a rental when I first arrived in Canberra, I have subsequently experienced homelessness when my initial tenancy ended. Real estate agents told me this was because of my low income (a Ph.D. stipend). This experience of homelessness really affected my ongoing feelings of security, of how I am valued by both the broader community and the University (who is responsible for setting my stipend level). It makes me worried and nervous, and I think about my financial status every day. Should I buy cheese (a minor luxury), or should I save that money in case I am in the same situation again. How can I avoid situations where it is socially expected that I spend money."

AFFORDABILITY

"As a full-time student and part-time worker, I feel the rent for on-campus accommodations seems to be high when compared with other universities. A little reduction in these rates would give self-supporting students a chance to make ends meet."

"Currently, most one-bedroom apartments in Canberra are priced on average about \$450-\$550 per week. Further, many of the rooms advertised in share houses are priced slightly lower than this, excluding bills. It is simply becoming impossible to live on a low to medium income in this city with current rental prices. Thank you for running this survey, as I am sure there are many others in similar and worse circumstances than me, and this is an experience I wish on nobody."

ANALYSIS

"I am already strapped for time looking for housing, caring for my children, cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping, writing, dealing with my supervisor, looking at how to stretch my finances...."

"The rent keeps skyrocketing. I've just been shown the rent for next year, and it had increased by \$50 from last year, and it had already increased by \$40 between 2021 and 2022. But wages don't rise that fast, so a lot of students, including myself, are just going to find the practicality of on-campus residence too expensive and be discriminated against accessing it simply because they don't have financial support."

ROOM FOR CHANGE
RECOMMENDATIONS &
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide secure accommodation for first-year postgraduate students

Almost two-thirds of postgraduate students start their student life at the ANU without secure accommodation, and a fifth of those take up to two months to find accommodation. Despite earlier promises from ANU that it would guarantee accommodation to first-year postgraduate students from 2021 onwards, this has yet to be honoured. PARSA pushes to ensure the university does not overlook first-year postgraduates, especially international students, and provide a guaranteed minimum one-year accommodation on campus.

ANU needs to make its on-campus housing affordable and accessible

With the increasing competitiveness of the current housing market and the discrimination students face from landlords and agents, finding secure off-campus accommodation is more complicated than ever. For those who do live off-campus, access to support services is insufficient, creating a welfare disparity between those living off-campus and those residing on-campus.

PARSA calls on the ANU to address the inadequate supply of on-campus accommodation, including accommodation suitable for families, and set on-campus rents in line with student incomes. Rather than compete with the off-campus market rents, PARSA asks the ANU to subsidise on-campus accommodation or renegotiate its concession deals.

Establish a dedicated Accommodation Officer at the ANU with increased support for off-campus students.

PARSA calls on the ANU to set up a dedicated accommodation officer who can assist overseas and ESL students with the off-campus application process, ensure they know their tenancy rights, and provide legal advice and support for illegal behaviour from landlords and agents. PARSA recommends increased support services across the board to off-campus students to address the significant disparity between those available to on-campus students.

Provide family-friendly on-campus accommodation

ANU needs to commit to providing family-friendly accommodation options. Postgraduate representatives (particularly the Parents and Carers officer) and student-parents need to be involved in the consultation process and designing family-friendly accommodation as proposed in the Postgraduate Parents: The Challenges of Parenting and Studying at the ANU report, based on the surveys done in 2017 and 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Better communication from ANU to students regarding accommodation

Students have reported arriving in Canberra for the student year, still waiting to hear back from university accommodations if they have been offered a place. This delay causes unnecessary anxiety and distress upon arrival and puts students on the back foot as study commences.

PARSA urges the ANU to streamline its on-campus accommodation processes and communicate clearly to students applying to live on-campus. PARSA recommends establishing a cut-off date where students are guaranteed a reply, and unsuccessful applicants are redirected and supported in finding alternatives.

Ensure continuity of emergency grants

With PARSA winding up end of June, the university needs to ensure the welfare of postgraduate students is prioritised. PARSA currently provides bursaries and grants for the postgraduate community, namely the PARSA Emergency Grant, Emergency Accommodation Grant, PARSA Family Safety Grant, Indigenous, and Health Wellbeing Grant, PARSA Study Essential Grant, and the Grocery Voucher Grant. ANU needs to ensure continuity in these services for the postgraduate community.

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