



Student Digs

National Survey 2023



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

Foreword from the President



Chris Clifford
Uachtarán 2023-2024

The scarcity of student housing in Ireland has plagued students for almost a decade, and is one of the symptoms of the wider flawed housing policy. The effects of this on students can be seen in every aspect of their education, making it far more burdensome than needs be.

USI, member Students' Unions, and others have frequently stated these difficulties and have emphasized the need for the Government to bear the responsibility and take active towards a solution for this crisis once and for all.

Public housing has been the cry of students for years, and for years, student accommodation has been reduced to the conscious of investors.

Government has not acted or shown resolve to address the situation. Instead of dealing with the crisis through transparent, long-term planning, the Government has relied upon sugarcoated quick fixes that do not address the problem's root cause. This shortsighted attitude has been centered around getting more students to live in DIGs.

Most notably, in the Funding the Future Options Paper release in 2023, the Government described DIGs as a 'sustainable long-term solution' to the student living crisis. In Digs accommodation, a homeowner or family rents out a room in their home. Every summer for years, government officials, third-level institutions, and Students' Unions have urged people to use the rooms advertised through the rent-a-room plan, which allows homeowners to earn up to €14,000 tax-free, to house students faced with the certainty of homelessness.

USI does not believe that Digs is a long-term solution to the student housing dilemma, and views Affordable Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (APBSA) as the only long-term solution to this crisis. Digs are merely a temporary solution to help some students avoid dropping out of college or delaying their studies. When the number of student who tried and could not get a room in PBSA this year reaches 30,000 students, we look at the Government to do more than simply make the 'market work better'.

Those availing of Digs have no legal rights or safeguards, and a student can see themselves on the streets without notice. This is not sustainable and results in significant numbers of sometimes complex and insurmountable cases each year. Simply, we believe the use public funds to promote and encourage the use of the rent-a-room scheme must come with checks and balances ensuring fair-use, safety and wellbeing for those participating.

With this in mind, USI conducted a Digs Survey at the end of the past academic year to assess Digs students' experiences. This report presents the research findings.

This survey taught us that written agreements make both students and homeowners feel safer. Most people desire pre-arranged arrangements so everyone understands their status. Often problematic circumstances should not be allowed to develop, as shown in this report. The right to sufficient notice if requested to leave or access to household utilities like cooking and cleaning areas are among the modest, necessary protections USI has been calling for.

USI thanks the almost 2,000 students who took this poll for sharing their experiences. We urge people in power to listen and make the necessary changes.

Chris Clifford
President / Uachtarán

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction & Overview

Background

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) ran a survey in March 2023, focused on examining the experiences of students living in Digs Style Accommodation, otherwise known as Rent-a-Room. USI engaged in research in this area based on the mandate passed by Member Organizations of the Union at the annual meeting of its Congress.

USI has long supported the extension of current Residential Tenancies legislation to include protections for those living on the same property as the homeowner. This has become increasingly important considering the increasing reliance by the Government on this type of accommodation for tackling the student accommodation crisis.

The Rent-a-Room scheme offers a tax-free income for any homeowner who rents part of their property, while also living in it. The Government, as communicated to USI by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science is opposed to regulating this type of accommodation, in order to keep an incentive for homeowners to engage in the scheme, once again relying on the market to solve an issue that may only be solved through long-term public investment.

Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2023

USI has engaged in supporting legislation in this area, supporting the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2023, which proposes increased protections for those living in this style of accommodation. The Bill is due to be put before Dáil Éireann in the coming weeks. We believe our research shows the need for regulation of this type of accommodation.

Research

The Union of Students in Ireland is publishing this report to present the findings of primary research it conducted around the living conditions for those living in properties together with the homeowner. This report is produced as part of the USI campaign aimed at securing protections for those living in Digs.

Methodology

Research conducted took the form of a survey directed at third-level students in the Republic of Ireland, with a focus on those living in Digs. Data were collected in March 2023. Survey forms contained questions in different formats, including multiple-choice questions, binary (yes/no) and open-ended questions. The questions focused on the primary experience of the respondents that have lived in Digs during their education. The questions focused on various elements relating to the security of tenure afforded to the respondents living in Digs, the extent to which they could use the facilities in the property, the nature of the relationship between the homeowner and the tenants, and the extent of freedom enjoyed by those who lived in Digs.

The survey was promoted by USI and Member Organizations, which includes the majority of student unions in the Republic of Ireland. The promotion of the survey was done through social media and

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various interactions with students during the period of data collection. The survey was made available to all third-level students

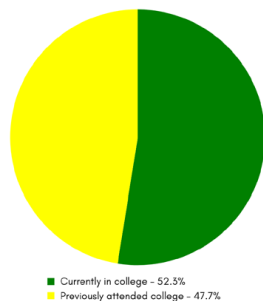
and was not limited to those who have lived in Digs. Those currently living in Digs were presented with a slightly distinct set of questions than those who have previously lived in Digs. The survey was taken by 1,973 student respondents.

Summary of Findings

- » Average monthly rent was €660.55
- » 11% of respondents that lived in Digs had access to a Bathroom, Fridge, Iron, Living Room, Oven/Stove, Television, Washing Machine & Tumble dryer).
- » 43% of respondents could use the rented room for the full week.
- » 59% lived in Digs because of a lack of alternatives
- » 57% of the students showed they would like to move out of Digs if they could.
- » 8% of respondents faced eviction by the homeowner.
- » 39% of respondents do not have a written agreement with the homeowner stating the terms of their residency. Where it exists, 65% of the time it was suggested by the homeowner.

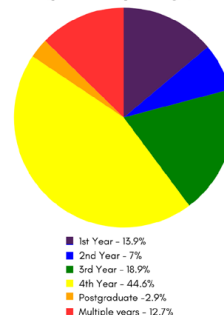
Demographic Breakdown

Are you currently attending college?



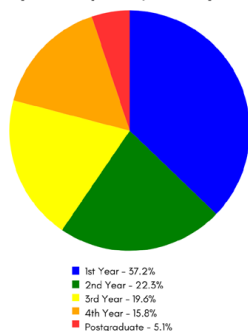
During their participation in the survey, 52% of participants were enrolled in third-level education and 47% were no longer enrolled.

During which college year did you live in digs (previously in digs)?



44.6% of the respondents not living in Digs when participating in the study but had previously lived in Digs, did so during their 4th year of studying.

What year are you in (currently in digs)?

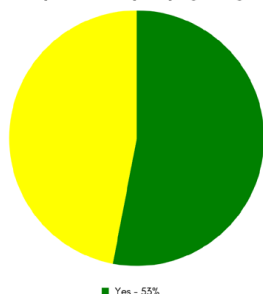


18.9% lived in Digs for the third year of their studies 15.8% lived in Digs during the first year of their studies, 12.7% lived in Digs for multiple years, 7% lived in DIGs during their second year, and 2.9% were in postgraduate education when they lived in Digs.

The majority (57.2%) of the respondents who were living in Digs when they participated in the study were in their first year of studies.

22.3% were in the second year of their studies, 19.6% were in their third year, 15.8% were in their fourth year, and 5.1% were in enrolled in postgraduate education.

Are you currently staying in digs?



53% of the respondents were living in Digs at the time of participating in the study, while 47% were not living in Digs but have done so in the past.

Responses to the Survey

Why Students are in Digs

Students face a wide range of issues whilst living in Digs. Digs are mainly sought out by students due to their relatively low cost. The option has also attracted students that don't want a full-week's accommodation, due to family or personal commitments to be elsewhere, usually at weekends.

Other traditional reasons for students living in Digs include not finding a group of friends to rent a full dwelling together or a desire for the home-like atmosphere of living with families that have spare rooms. This could involve free meals or living with others.

The student living crisis, especially the shortage of affordable purpose-built student accommodation (APBSA), has changed the reasons students seek Digs. The results of the data strongly indicate that

The target for Purpose Built Student Accommodation has been missed by more than 50%

government incentives to rent extra rooms has been factor. The Rent-a-Room plan has no special requirements for student room renters or homeowners. In the absence of affordable private rental options, the Rent-a-Room scheme with its €14,000 tax-free income to homeowners has become essential for many students.

In short, the attraction to living in Digs accommodation has become driven by a lack of alternatives rather than the benefits it may provide for certain students. This is discussed further when examining the changing profile of those living in Digs.

Changing profile

Comparing responses from former Digs residents to those who lived in Digs during the data collecting period shows a worrying demographic change caused by the recent repurposing of the option. Students are turning to Digs earlier in their college career. Previously, residents who resided in Digs mostly did so throughout their final years of third-level education.

In the data collected in our survey, Digs residents were mostly in their first year of third-level education.

Students in their first year are prioritized for PBSA in

properties owned by HEIs. This approach ensures that first-year students spend time with their peers outside of class, among other reasons. It helps students studying away from home adjust to the substantial changes of third-level education. Most first-year students prefer this. Due to the scarcity of inexpensive PBSA, first-year students must sacrifice the formative experience of living with their classmates and the security of tenure at institution owned housing.

Later-stage students care more about saving money and having a calmer area for their education. This makes Digs better for them than first-year students.

“It was absolutely miserable, and extremely isolating, especially for a first year. Found it incredibly difficult to make friends. If I was still in Digs, I probably would've dropped out”

When asked “Was Digs an option you felt that you had to choose due to a lack of alternatives?” a clear majority of respondents (59%) answered “yes, I couldn't find anywhere else”, an issue that is addressed in detail at later stages of this report.

Demand and Supply Side measures

Already scarce student housing is being advertised at prices way above most students' budgets, resulting in an abrupt shift in the number of students living in digs.

Digs accommodation is often cheaper than PBSA or the private rental market, but students sacrifice renter rights and certain services when choosing this option. The tax exemption in the Rent-a-Room scheme was increased from €12,000 to €14,000 in the 2017-2024 National Student Accommodation Strategy (NSAS), reflecting two changes in the student accommodation offering in the country.

The first is higher student accommodation baseline pricing as a result of a heavy reliance on private suppliers, which skews market entry prices. Second, the NSAS intends to increase the number of students living in Digs to 4,000 every year, a 60% increase from 2016.

The Government's motivation for Digs accommodation was based mostly on the rhetoric that it is not viable to create PBSA accommodation on or off campus to fully meet student demand, leaving a place for more traditional options like Digs accommodation.

Responses to the Survey

On the ground, the effect of the Government falling more than 50% short of its PBSA development target skews that combination. Digs is being used to compensate for, rather than complement, the absence of APBSA.

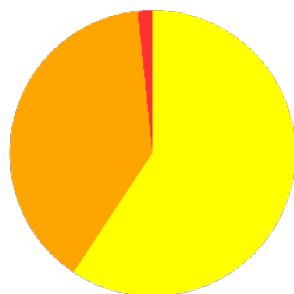
Finally, while first year students top the chart for the demographic living in Digs, the runner up is a group in a similarly precarious position,

PhD researchers. PhD researchers are seeking this style of accommodation while, in reality, if compensated adequately for the work they do

The “Choice” to live in Digs

No space for choice

Did you take a room in digs because you didn't have another option?



■ Yes, I couldn't find another room - 59.5%
■ No, it was the cheapest for me - 39%
■ No, gave another reason - 1.7%

The NSAS stipulates that the government will try to increase the number of students living in Digs as part of its reaction to the shortage of student housing, but the only action by the only action taken by the Government to achieve that objective is increasing the tax incentive for homeowners to participate in this scheme.

Due to students' limited options, when the goal is exclusively connected to the tax benefit given to the homeowners, the technique upholds the status quo of little to no space for choice.

In order to convince students to live in digs, it would be necessary to address the fundamental concerns that they have with this kind of housing, namely the instability and lack of security associated with it.

This section assesses the decision to promote Digs

accommodation in order to make up for the lack of APBSA by looking at recorded responses to two key questions: whether or not the student would move out of Digs accommodation if given the option, and whether or not they chose to live in this kind of accommodation because there were no other options.

“It was always a permanent option, I never seen anything else as an option to live in as student accommodation is too expensive”

“its a good enough alternative option as a last resort, but needs to be regulated in some way”

Prior to providing an analysis of the results, direct accounts—qualitative responses—that were gathered as part of the survey are reviewed.

Lack of Alternatives

The overreliance on Digs housing, which has shaped public policy around student housing in Ireland, is evident in the 59% of respondents who indicated that they reside in Digs because they were unable to locate housing elsewhere.

There has been a recurring shortfall of APBSA.

The broader impact of the flawed

housing policy also included the lifting of the prohibition on no-fault evictions, the departure from a rent freeze as a means of reducing the cost of living crisis, and the enforceability or meaninglessness of the affordability requirement that, in theory, forms the basis of public funding

The “Choice” to live in Digs

for student housing.

Some of the direct accounts provided by the respondents classify Digs as the option to be sought only when other options are not available or are unaffordable:

“Avoid living in Digs they should be a last resort”

“I think it’s disgusting that this is the only option for most students.”

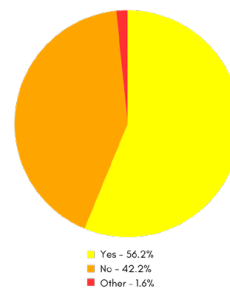
The second question about whether the student would move out if they could similarly reflects the paucity of options. Even though 56% of the respondents said they wanted to leave Digs’ accommodations, they didn’t think they could.

When a student decides to stay in a particular place, they are forced to locate housing quickly before the academic year starts, which results in a significant loss of opportunity; it is not viable for them to move during that period.

While USI agrees that Digs should be made available to students, it shouldn’t be their sole option, and must be regulated to protect the parties involved to avoid the often burdensome situations that come to light in this context.

Numerous students have had favourable experiences with their time spent living in Digs, as detailed in the report’s section on student

Would you move out of digs, if you could?



experiences there.

Furthermore, according to 42.3 percent of respondents, even if they had the option, they would stay in Digs accommodations.

Therefore, all options ought to be made available, especially considering the biggest housing crisis in the nation’s history.

But as is always the case, a choice that is accessed only because there isn’t a better option also automatically loses its value. While USI will continue to demand the best solutions available, it will support efforts aimed at providing a roof over a person’s head.

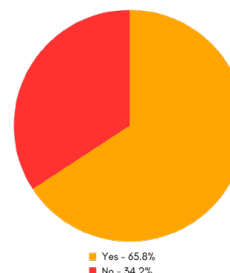
The Student-Homeowner Relationship

A key component of determining whether Digs accommodations are appropriate for students is the relationship between the student and the landowner, an area in which USI has long offered advice. Examining the formal living arrangement, the parties’ arguments, and the student’s welfare as a result of the relationship all help to capture this element.

Written Agreement

USI has advocated for requiring a written contract between the homeowner and the tenant in order to be

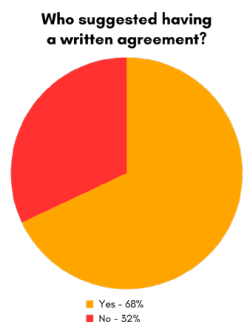
Did you have a written agreement with the homeowner?



eligible for the program. In response to USI’s efforts in this area, the suggestion is that this modification would lower the number of homeowners who rent out spare rooms to students, hence lowering the quality of

The Student-Homeowner Relationship

available housing even further. In this sense, a written agreement is an arrangement between a homeowner and a renter that specifies notice requirements, rights, obligations, and other considerations for living in the residence.



65.8% of the students who answered the survey indicated that they do have a written agreement with the landowner when asked. 68 percent of those incidents involved the homeowner suggesting a formal agreement. According to USI, these results run counter to the narrative that a homeowner will be less willing to give up their space if the agreement is made mandatory or if receiving government assistance is dependent on having the agreement.

As a result, USI reiterates its position that a written agreement between the homeowner and the resident must be required by law in order for homeowners who are taking part in the plan to receive compensation. These kinds of agreements are advantageous to all parties and aren't thought to be a factor that would decrease the availability of rental property in other areas of the private rental market.

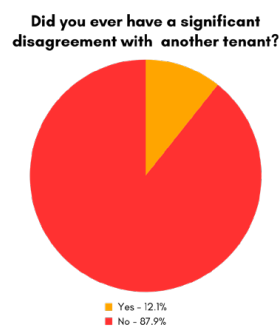
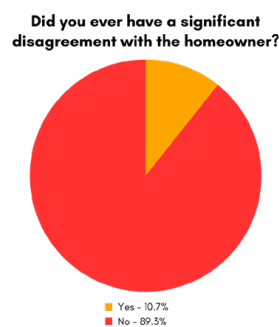
USI reiterates its position that a written agreement between the homeowner and the resident must be required by law

Lastly, the government expanded the Renters' Relief (tax credit) in Budget 2024 to cover both parents and students when the parent pays the rent on the student's behalf. In order to receive the relief, the person claiming this tax credit who resides in Digs is not required to provide information about their tenancy registration with the Residential Tenancies Board. USI supports implementing this policy for all kinds of housing since the tenant cannot fulfill the registration requirement on their own and must pay the consequences of not being able to

obtain the credit.

Disagreements in House

Respondents were asked if they have had any significant disagreements with the homeowner or other residents while living in Digs. Respondents



also had the opportunity to make a comment on such disagreements where they existed. The findings show that almost 90% of respondents did not have a significant disagreement with the homeowner, and around 88% of the respondents did not have a significant disagreement with other tenants.

USI understands that disagreements are an inevitable part of living with others, and ultimately views the majority of responses as a testament to how this option could work in favour of students who need a roof over their heads.

Nevertheless, USI views the importance of having the remit of the RTB's dispute resolution body extended to include Digs accommodation.

A specialized external body could resolve such

disagreements and mitigate the asymmetric balance of power in this relationship.

Furthermore, feedback indicates that in cases where there is a major argument among the renters, the homeowner is frequently left to settle the dispute. It's possible that a homeowner isn't the right person to handle this, so USI advocates for having the RTB intervene as necessary to settle these kinds of conflicts.

Homeowner Duties

The study addressed the homeowner's role as a property guardian and the responsibilities they bear for maintaining the property. Of those surveyed, 37 percent indicated that everything in

the house was in working order, and 51 percent said that although some things weren't, problems were resolved when they arose. USI takes these results positively because property maintenance is a fundamental duty of the landowner and is covered by the money paid by guests.

Living in Digs: The Experience

Quantitative data was used to show trends about the freedoms and restrictions that come with living with a homeowner, and qualitative data was used to dig deeper into the living experience. It was collected from people who lived in Digs.

Days with access to the room

A common feature of Digs living arrangements is having the room rented for a portion of the week. This could be to meet the needs of both parties, but also could be a feature students agree to due to the need to find a place to live. When asked how many days they were allowed to stay in the room they are renting, only 43% of respondents said that they were allowed to stay in the room for the full week (7 Days).

The second common selection is reflected by the 24% of respondents that were only allowed to stay 4 days a week or less, leaving 21% of respondents who stayed in the room for 5 days a week, and 12% who stayed 6 days a week in the room.

"Is not a sustainable way of living having to travel hours every weekend home and back it affected finding jobs that would suit my availability"

Rent-a-Room relief is available to homeowners regardless of how many days a week the room is being rented this way. It is concerning that the relief amount is not adjusted to reflect the reasonable rate decrease that one would anticipate when renting a room for a portion of the week.

While some students may find value in the choice to live in Digs on specific days of the week, USI considers this to be an unsustainable way of life for the majority of students. As a result, the alternative provides advantages, but for the sake of pricing, it ought not to be considered a full-time living arrangement.

USI calls upon the Government to review the blanket rate applying to the relief available for homeowners, and to make it proportional to the days the room is offered as Digs accommodation. The purpose of this is to drive rates lower for rooms that are not rented for a full week. The relief mechanism signals to homeowners what an acceptable rate for room is, and as such must be adjusted to mitigate this inconsistency.

Did you have a curfew?



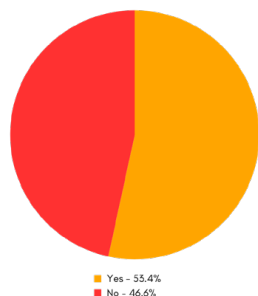
Freedoms and Restrictions

Students were asked about the restrictions on their lives as a result of living in DIGS accommodation. Particularly, students were asked if they had a curfew where they were living and if they were allowed to have visitors. With regards having a specific time at

Student Experiences

night to be home at, 90% of the respondents said that they did not have a curfew, and 53% of respondents were allowed to have visitors.

Were you allowed to have visitors?



While USI recognizes that the majority of students do not have a curfew, we have concerns on punitive measures that the homeowner may be able to take against the student for breaching this curfew, without taking into consideration the factors that may have led them to do so, or any prescribed due process for

such actions. This is the aspect of the agreement, if in place, that is most likely to be impacted by factors outside the control of the student than any other.

“I felt obliged to text them every time I would be home late and felt uncomfortable in the home.”

USI therefore wants regulations to make sure that these kinds of events don't get out of hand and result in unfair actions being done against the student. In the end, regulations governing this kind of housing will specify the scope of the homeowner's options in this regard and would clearly define curfew violations as outwith grounds for tenant eviction.

Students in their own words

When the research was completed, some comments provided by participants when given the opportunity to comment powerfully underline many of the trends USI has been hearing of anecdotally since the beginning of the expansion of Digs. By no means are all comments negative, and it is clear from the comments that many students enjoyed their experience of living with homeowners.

Clearly, however, many students wish they had had an opportunity to avail of the rights expected by renters and PBSA residents.

“I lived in Digs when COVID broke out and I feel the need to mention that the landlord was very kind and allowed me to keep my stuff during lockdown there without charging me rent and even allowed me to stay the night when collecting my stuff that Summer.”

“They should be registered with the RTB.”

“Avoid living in Digs they should be a last resort.”

“Family were lovely to live with, I just felt that with not being able to have visitors I felt like a guest in a place I was renting. In terms of a Digs experience it couldn't have been better given the circumstances.”

Enjoyed living with them.”

“Didn't like it as I felt like I was missing out on other college things and didn't help making friends being in 1st year. Lonely at times.”

“Digs landlord was not registered and took advantage of me and my housemates they stole our food and upped our rent many times and we had to comply”

“I wasn't evicted but moved due to feeling unwelcome.”

“I feel I got particularly lucky with the lady I stayed with while my friend didn't have near as good an experience.”

“Would never live in Digs nor would I ever recommend it to family or friends. All of my friends have had a negative experience in living in Digs, invasion of privacy and are very restricting on college life you will not get the full experience.”

“I feel like my situation was rare as I lived my Digs house and would have remained if not for the pandemic. I was their first student and they were using me as a €€ Guinea Pig to check if the price

was okay, the living arrangements worked, etc. They only took in students ... They were great hosts and I am so grateful for them”

“As an international student on a scholarship, it is particularly challenging to find accommodation. You are a grown person with a heavy workload, you can’t find any accommodation apart from Digs as your stipend barely covers basic needs and you don’t have the luxury to go home at the weekend like local students. You feel lucky to have a roof over your head so you make sure not to upset your homeowner even in situations that are not ideals or may feel unfair - for as long as you can bear it.”

“No protections from threshold, RTB, I lost out on my rent and deposit and could not source alternative accommodation, I was forced to commute 3 hours daily.”

“A lot of things were not disclosed to me (ex. Cameras in the home) until it suited them, and they attempted to parent me”

“I felt I did not have privacy. When I left the homeowners would come into my room and move things or tell me that I should move things. When I told them I did not feel comfortable with this they dismissed me. I was also told there would be Wi-Fi which was important for me to do work there, but it did not work properly at all. I was told I would be able to stay some weekends but after I started living there, I found out this would be a £50. They also charged me for an extra week before I moved in and did not specify this in advance.”

“I never felt safe around the homeowner. Digs shouldn’t exist I don’t see why IADT is a major college but doesn’t have student accommodation and even if it did, people like me wouldn’t be considered in the pricing of it.”

Trends and interpretation

General Experience: Trends

The general trends analysed in the qualitative data sampled above surround regulating Digs, the lack of privacy, good experiences because of a hospitable family, positive feedback that is described as an exception to the rule, issues relating to privacy and safety, and issues surrounding mis-advertisement.

First, on the need to regulate, this issue emerged in multiple response in the two contexts: security of tenure, RTB registration and dispute resolution.

While the issues are interlinked, and resolving registration and dispute resolution may contribute to an improved security of tenure, this is by no mean certain.

Disparity

The overarching trend seen here is the homeowner abusing their position of strength, that is mainly powerful because of the housing policy in Ireland, particularly relating to APBSA. Digs are not subject to Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) legislation, and USI views this as a major inconsistency amongst many other inconsistencies seen with the approach taken with Digs as opposed to any other type of private rental accommodation.

Registration

The homeowner is not obligated to be registered with the RTB, and the jurisdiction of the RTB's dispute resolution body to hear disputes in Digs accommodation is not clear. This leaves Digs with no oversight whatsoever by any agency, despite the large public funds foregone to provide the relief. This is the same issue in cases of mis advertisement, whether it is false advertising and pricing, or even cases of misrepresentation as to the type of the accommodation.

Misrepresentation

Cases where the property was advertised to the renter as homeowner non-occupied, and then turned out to be owner-occupied, are not uncommon. Such cases of abuse are beyond the reach of the current law on Residential Tenancies, and the lack of enforcement on such cases may allow the homeowner to avail of the Relief despite

the false advertising.

Regarding the experience of students with the homeowner, or the family they are living with, positive responses are also not uncommon. Students in multiple cases expressed gratitude and satisfaction with their homeowners, especially where it was a family in the house.

Lucky students?

However, a notable trend seen from the data is that approximately 60% of the student providing positive feedback about their experience think that their experience is an exception to the rule. Others attribute it to luck. This is yet another reflection of the inconsistencies in the experience of students living in Digs because of the lack of any regulation in the area.

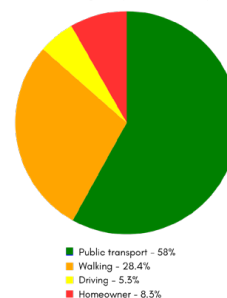
Finally, students have recorded cases where privacy was not respected, and sometimes breached. Others said that the conduct of their homeowner makes them feel unsafe.

This relates to cases where the homeowner would go into the room without prior notice or seeking permission from the student to do so in mild cases, to cases of alleged harassment in more extreme cases.

Commuting and Digs

When asked how far their campus was from the house, 51.4% said out that it was 1-5 kilometres from the house, while 31% provided that it was less than a kilometre away from the house. When asked how they get to college, 58% of the respondents said that relied on public transportation to do so, while 28.4% walked, and 8.3% did so with the

How did you get to college?



support of the homeowner. When asked if the

homeowner would offer or supply transportation, 46.9% of responses said no, whereas 33.4% said they were sometimes offered transport.

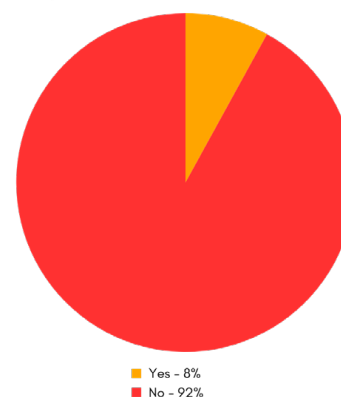
One reason students may live in Digs, besides the reasons mentioned previously, is the proximity of the property to their campus. An increasing number of students are taking Digs in further areas, because of the lack of any alternatives.

Evictions

When asked about evictions from their Digs accommodation, 8% of the respondents said that they have been required to leave. We note the survey was run during the life of the ban on no-fault evictions. The number is particularly concerning, as it is high even without taking into consideration cases where the student was constructively evicted. This is a tactic used in the rental market when the landlord, or in this case, the homeowner, does not wish to undergo the formalities of ending the rental relationship themselves, and it is also causes multiple cases of losing deposits and other rights that they would have if they have been formally evicted.

Cohorts living in Digs are living in the most

Have you ever been evicted from digs?



precarious situations and need the protection to be provided to them by the Government to balance the playing field and allow them a secure tenure. USI calls upon the Government to reinstate the ban on no-fault evictions, while explicitly including Digs accommodation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, we will provide a set of recommendations for the use of Digs accommodation for students moving forward.

Digs is an option for students only in the short term

Firstly, the report shows that Digs is an option that students seek for various reasons. The most prominent among which is the ongoing issues with housing, and particularly the scarcity of any other options. On that end, we would like to reiterate our view on the use of Digs. In these circumstances Digs cannot be discounted from the equation, but must clearly be referred to as a short-term option that cannot substitute APBSA. APBSA is the optimal and only solution to the student living crisis.

Incentivising Digs excludes the student voice from the policy arena

The government is looking at making all options available for students to live in. This is a logical response to the need for housing students, and for attending to the main priority of putting a roof over someone's head. However, in encouraging student to use Digs, focusing merely on incentivizing the homeowner to participate in the scheme is counterproductive and discounts the student voice from the decision entirely.

Regulation is needed

Finally, the option is being looked at as a way to attend to current issues with regard to housing. The option remain unregulated and suits the asymmetric balance of power between a homeowner and a student. Homeowners are families and individuals that have opened their home to people and are usually hospitable and decent. However, this is not the way we call for policy decisions to be made, and emphasize the need for binding regulation for both parties, specifically when the government is putting public funds on the line to secure this option.

Recommendations:

- To enact the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2023 which would grant a better level of protection for all parties involved, and makes sure that no student is exploited for the circumstances that have lead them to seek this option.
- To evaluate te rent-a-room relief and to make the tax-free amount proportional to the amount of days a room owner uses the room for Digs.
- The government to publish the National Student Accommodation Strategy, as promised 3 years ago, and release clear plans with the public development of APBSA at the core of them.
- Extending the remit of the RTB, particularly the dispute resolution body of the RTB, to cover those living in Digs.
- To reinstate the ban no-fault evictions until such point that the housing crisis is resolved at its core.
- To create a Rent-a-Room Registry that would allow students to ensure the legitimacy of the homeowner, property and for the registration of vacancies on this platform to be made mandatory for receiving the relief.
- To strictly crack down on the misadvertisement of Digs properties as being not occupied by the homeowner.
- To extent the application of Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) legislation to include Digs properties.