



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND
YOUTH AFFAIRS**

(Reference: [Accommodation needs of tertiary education students in the ACT](#))

Members:

**MS A BRESNAN (The Chair)
MR J HANSON (The Deputy Chair)
MS M PORTER**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 30 AUGUST 2011

**Secretary to the committee:
Dr B Lloyd (Ph: 6205 0137)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 9 August 2011

The committee met at 2 pm.

WALLS, MS ELAINE, Student Services Coordinator, Student Association, Canberra Institute of Technology

THE CHAIR: I would like to welcome you to this inquiry into the accommodation needs of tertiary education students in the ACT. Are you aware of the privilege statement that is in front of you? Have you read that?

Ms Walls: Yes.

THE CHAIR: And you are aware of the implications?

Ms Walls: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for coming, Ms Walls. Before we go to questions from the committee, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Walls: Sure. I would like to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to come and speak today. It is an agenda item that has been discussed at CIT for many years, because we are at the coalface and we usually get inquiries coming directly to the Student Association.

The point I would like to raise today is that CIT is always affected by what happens at the other institutions in the ACT in regard to their enrolments. We usually find that if there is a demand at ANU or UC, it impacts greatly on CIT because our students seem to have the last option for accommodation. I just wanted to make that point. But in terms of everything else, I think I have covered it in the submission, and I am happy to answer any questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. In your submission you talk about student experiences with current accommodation, and they are issues which you have canvassed with students. A consistent point coming across from the student associations is about the issue of public transport, and being close to campuses. One issue is that students prefer to live in the CBD for employment but they also want to be near the campus. You probably have the dual things at CIT. Are they two of the most important issues when it comes to those particular factors?

Ms Walls: We have so many different cohorts of students. If it is a regional student coming for block release, they want to be located close to campus. But their accommodation is also required for a temporary stay. For students who are younger and who do not know people in Canberra—we have regional students—they tend to need secure accommodation. Parents often want them to live close by the institute if they do not have transport or they are not familiar with the ACT. Historically, I think students always like to be located close to the place of study. The city area has always been in high demand. When we had access to Currong apartments, that was always the first option for our students: “Can I get into Currong?” Having been involved in that since the beginning, it has always had a waiting list, from day one.

THE CHAIR: You said that CIT students seem to be down the list when it comes to

getting accommodation. Is that something you have found to be consistent across time?

Ms Walls: Perhaps it is an assumption that people who go to CIT live in Canberra. Maybe they used to, but I think the region has broadened, and we do have a lot more students from the south coast, from Bombala, from Crookwell, Goulburn and Young. They do not commute any more. They tend to relocate. That sort of notion that they are always local students is no longer true. We do have a lot more students that are from the outer regions that do need to relocate.

THE CHAIR: With apprentices—obviously you would have a lot of apprentices based at CIT—are they a particular group that are impacted or is it again across the board?

Ms Walls: It is across the board, yes. They are a particularly different group because they have different study modes. If they are doing a block release of one week a month or five weeks a term, they have to find short-term accommodation. And that is probably impossible. They do stay at hostels, but we have been housing students privately because they are so young. Some of them are under 18 and they relocate. They do not understand the legalities of guardianship. But they are employed by Woolworths or they are doing bakery apprenticeships and they travel from Wagga for a week. So with that problem of trying to find them particular accommodation we have always solved it with either teachers or staff. But we do not advertise that, because we cannot accommodate for all.

MR HANSON: How do you find the people that offer their homes to students? Do you advertise for that?

Ms Walls: Only internally, through the CIT teachers network and our own staff.

MR HANSON: You have not considered advertising more broadly?

Ms Walls: Yes. I was approached by one of the unions who advertised it through its membership, and this year was a bit different from previous years. We have not had the pressure for accommodation this year that we have had in previous years, and that has been the first time—

MR HANSON: Is that because enrolments are down?

Ms Walls: Yes, and I think probably most affected by international. International students tend to take the accommodation as soon as they can get it. I find that we sort of get bumped off the end. We have had a drop in international students at CIT, but I still think that is only temporary. The accommodation issues for students have been long term. You will notice that I was on the Chief Minister's working party in 2004 which had the same agenda but looked at almost emergency accommodation, and that saw the opening up of the Currong apartments.

THE CHAIR: Yes, for students.

Ms Walls: I think this year there has just been temporary, artificial relief from that

problem.

MR HANSON: With the decline in enrolments, do you think that the pressure on accommodation is a factor there?

Ms Walls: Yes.

MR HANSON: So people will go elsewhere because it is just too difficult to get a—

Ms Walls: Yes.

MR HANSON: So it is affecting, I guess, the ACT's competitiveness in the market?

Ms Walls: Completely. The thing that has always concerned me is that when we have looked at things like the big drive to move enrolments into the ACT, my question has always been, "Where are they going to stay?" That just puts the problem at our door in January when we have parents arriving from regional areas saying, "So what do we do about accommodation?" "Well, actually, we haven't got any."

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: Thank you. You have got 76 rooms?

Ms Walls: At CIT?

DR BOURKE: Yes. You have some houses, though, don't you, as well?

Ms Walls: No.

DR BOURKE: Have you not taken on any houses for students to live in?

Ms Walls: It would have been a temporary move. I do not manage any CIT accommodation. That is managed by CIT. The Student Association just refers people to the CIT international unit for that. CIT has on campus—I think in the past we have had a range of different options, from Jamieson House to renting out houses but, as far as I know, this year the stats that I put in here are accurate as to what is happening in 2011.

DR BOURKE: I recall speaking to some CIT students at Jamison centre in June, who told me that they were staying in a CIT—

Ms Walls: Bowman House? They have one group lodge. Bowman House, it could be. That is the only one that I am aware of.

DR BOURKE: And that is at Jamison?

Ms Walls: Bowman House? Hackett.

DR BOURKE: They said it was in Jamison. Not to worry.

Ms Walls: No.

DR BOURKE: The decreased pressure for international student demand, isn't that something that is happening across the board in Australia?

Ms Walls: Yes.

DR BOURKE: So if there is going to be less demand, what impact do you think that is going to have on the overall student housing market?

Ms Walls: I do not know when we reach a level that means it equalises. I do not know that any of the institutions are not going to continue to try and up the international market. I think this year we have hit a particular low as a result of incidents in Melbourne, but I think the international market is a huge market for every institution in Australia, and we are all competing for international students. I see it as temporary relief but not a long-term solution to local accommodation needs.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned the Chief Minister's working party. I was interested to see that in the submission. You said also that it did not really have the brief to look at the long term and now you are not sure where the group is at. What actually came out of the group? Was there any undertaking with that group to carry things forward or to act on anything?

Ms Walls: No. I resigned from that committee because it did not seem to have any focus. I said in the submission that I thought that it looked more at the solutions for ANU at the time. The first question the committee members were asked was: what could each institution contribute in terms of accommodation solutions? The CIT's situation is that we do not come to any committee with cash on the table. As a student association, we were not able to offer any land or building projects. I felt that the committee had a brief to find a solution within the membership of the committee and, as a government institution, it did not really have that brief. I was there as a rep for the student association. The CIT representative was the head of counselling. We were dealing with the issue more from the point of view of what we do with students that we cannot find accommodation for—not whether or not we could build accommodation. It did not go anywhere.

What happened out of that was that the government's short-term solution was to give us the decommissioned building of Currong, but that was negotiated outside of the committee. When we met in the January, it was already decided. We got 35 apartments, which we were managing with a housing cooperative called APSA—ACT postgraduate student accommodation—which was set up in 1984. Lots of ACT houses that were decommissioned for redevelopment were handed to this organisation called APSA. We were able to put students temporarily in substandard housing, which they did not mind, for a period of time before the government recalled it for development.

MR HANSON: Is APSA still around?

Ms Walls: No, APSA closed in 2008. ACT Housing amalgamated a lot of organisations, and APSA amalgamated with Havelock. It actually owned a house in Kaleen, which was a grant from the ACT government in the early 1980s. We are not

sure where that house is now or whether it has still got students in it, but there is one house in Kaleen.

THE CHAIR: You are saying there were houses from Housing ACT that needed some work, so students were put in there in the meantime?

Ms Walls: Sometimes those houses were on APSA's books for 10 years because it took that long for a development to eventuate.

THE CHAIR: The main purpose, from your point of view, when you went into that working party was to say, "What can the universities give us in terms of land or housing?" Was there any discussion about partnerships or other solutions? This seemed, like you said, a pretty short-term solution.

Ms Walls: I think the brief changed in the course of the working party. It became narrower as the solutions seemed harder. In the end, a lot of the universities did not attend. I used to go. There was ANU and UC, but ADFA pulled out. It was prior to UC building the villages. I think people already had solutions on their books for the long term, but we were looking at short-term solutions. We did not have any short-term or long-term solutions at CIT. We had an application in for housing this year. We are not quite sure why it was knocked back, but that was a solution for us that was long term.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: Yes. It might be difficult to quantify, but I am just interested in what you think that delta is in accommodation—the gap, the order of magnitude. I appreciate it is difficult for you to quantify it—

Ms Walls: It is a hard one.

MR HANSON: on a consistent basis, because it obviously fluctuates year to year and this year might be a bit different. In the broad are you saying that we need an extra 100 accommodation places, an extra 1,000, an extra 50? What is the quantum?

Ms Walls: If we were just to use this year as an example, we have had a decline of approximately 300 international enrolments and that has taken the pressure off. It may not be thousands; it could be hundreds. You are right—I do not know. It could be a couple of hundred studio apartments. ANU did a huge amount to address the pressure they were putting on the market, and I think that is when we felt it the most. They built their containers up on Clunies Ross, which were fantastic. Then they managed to access City Gate and Wattle Lodge. They are real movers and shakers in terms of solving their problems because I think they come to the table with a fair bit of cash. We are unable—

MR HANSON: As people move out of accommodation in the community into those ANU-specific ones, it creates gaps for you, I suppose.

Ms Walls: Possibly, yes. We have no qualitative or quantitative research data. We just know that a year ago we had students that were living in a library that we were

getting into garages. They were situations where I just felt terrible—

MR HANSON: And that is foreign students mostly?

Ms Walls: One international student last year. CIT houses all international students, if they choose to be allocated housing. Some choose not to because they think it is too expensive and they might be able to find a cheaper option. A year ago there was no cheaper option. They should have ticked the box, but they did not know that. I think they hope that they can get it for less than \$245 a week.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: Yes. Just coming back to the block release students, in your submission you talked about accommodation alternatives. What happens?

Ms Walls: They couch surf. They turn up on the first day and they ask people in class if they have got any ideas about where they can stay. They stay at the YHA in the city, where sometimes eight share, but they worry about their cars and their tools. Some drive back to Cooma every day or back to Goulburn or skip the last day. I do not really know what they do. I am loath to ask because if I ask I have to help solve the problem. In Currong we actually set up an apartment for apprentices. When I was working with APSA we had an apartment set aside for block release. We did not permanently have anyone in it, but we booked it. You could book it for three weeks and we used that. We were able to negotiate with the government that that one apartment would not have full rent because it would be empty some of the time, so we did not pay rent the weeks that there was no-one there.

THE CHAIR: What happened to that?

Ms Walls: It has been absorbed. I have no connections with Currong anymore so I do not know. We furnished it. We had keys to it. We collected the rent and we paid it over.

DR BOURKE: So there is no overall strategic plan within the institution so that you would schedule your block releases at separate times and you would have, say, your motor mechanic apprentices in this week, your painters in next week and so on?

Ms Walls: We could do that. In the proposal for the CIT student housing, it was discussed as an option to have accommodation that specifically catered for the needs of block release students.

DR BOURKE: Do you have any idea of the number of students who are coming from the region?

Ms Walls: Out of the region? No, I am sorry, I do not.

DR BOURKE: Okay. This would seem to be an issue of regional development which would probably be of interest to Regional Development Australia, which has both southern inland and ACT-specific committees. Have you approached them to seek their input?

Ms Walls: No, I have not, because accommodation is not an agenda that we have down. Because we do not have any accommodation, I am really just a broker in the market. I do not really approach anybody to solve the problem. We look to the private market. We help students. We let them use our resources to find their own accommodation, but I am only a broker in terms of the students' advice.

DR BOURKE: You actually work for the student association?

Ms Walls: The association, not for CIT.

DR BOURKE: Not for CIT?

Ms Walls: No.

DR BOURKE: Do they have somebody who looks after student accommodation?

Ms Walls: They have international. Their international unit looks after students in their on-campus accommodation. In their housing, their resses, their Monterey apartments-owned accommodation and the Bowman House accommodation, that is managed by CIT.

DR BOURKE: But they do not actually have someone who is specifically set aside to look after student housing?

Ms Walls: No. Unlike other institutions, we do not have a housing unit. It is almost a student service, to even consider it. But we have got other issues too at CIT that are probably not specific to the other institutions, and that is our under 18s that need accommodation. That is the group that I dealt with this year, because as we get down the pecking order of need, the ones that we were left with this year were students who needed guardianship, and CIT does not put students under 18 in their residential accommodation. They put them in home stay.

MR HANSON: How much does someone get if they are in home stay? Your board is \$265 a week?

Ms Walls: Yes.

MR HANSON: So that is what?

Ms Walls: They get food.

MR HANSON: Yes, but if someone is in home stay, you then pay an amount to the—

Ms Walls: To the family.

MR HANSON: Do you pay that or does the individual pay that?

Ms Walls: The individual pays it.

MR HANSON: Yes, and that is negotiated?

Ms Walls: Yes, they could probably charge them less. That is a negotiated rate. With CIT's referencing for home stay, all of those home stay parents are accredited to be appropriate people, because we are putting under-age people in their care.

MR HANSON: Yes, it is an issue.

Ms Walls: So the risk involved with that is huge.

THE CHAIR: Like you said, they are primarily within the CIT teaching body?

Ms Walls: No, I think the home stay people can be anyone. I do not know where CIT advertises for its home stay. The department of education does home stay as well.

THE CHAIR: So you are not sure where they get the contacts?

Ms Walls: No. They apply, then they are checked out by CIT, and the accommodation is checked out to make sure that it is suitable, it is not a garage, it is heated, it is genuine.

MR HANSON: I think there are some private providers in that space, too.

THE CHAIR: We have got the Tenants Union coming in later. One of the things they raised in their submission was around occupancy agreements. I am not saying that this could potentially have happened but have you heard about where there are less rights in terms of the tenant with occupancy agreements—

Ms Walls: That is right.

THE CHAIR: because they do not come under the act, essentially. Have there ever been any issues with that?

Ms Walls: I have only ever spoken to a couple of students that wanted to move out of home stay. They do not necessarily like the people. They have cultural differences. They might have animals they do not like. I am not sure. I have seen situations with international students where a married couple were placed in home stay. They did not realise that is what it meant. They thought they would have private accommodation within a home. But it was a room in a house. People's perceptions of it can be something that is not quite understood.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned in your submission the WA government and what they were doing.

Ms Walls: That was just a search. I just searched as to what other people had done and I had heard about Western Australia doing some subsidised housing.

THE CHAIR: Do you know anything about that?

Ms Walls: I do not know any more about it. That was just a search.

THE CHAIR: That is something we can look at.

Ms Walls: I just put it up there as I thought it might be a model that is worth building on.

THE CHAIR: That is right. Any model is interesting to look at.

Ms Walls: I did not hear it but somebody mentioned to me that the ANU post-graduate student association today mentioned establishing a housing collective to access ACT government housing for students. I just want to put on the table that that is exactly what APSA was in 1984. It operated under that exact model until 2008. But it was the accreditation of small incorporated associations that changed the nature of that. In order for them to be accredited, it was an enormous amount of money for a staff of one. So that is when they handed over to Havelock.

THE CHAIR: Yes, because under existing—you have to be accredited, yes.

Ms Walls: I just wanted it noted that that is exactly what existed. They may not have been students at around that time so they might not know that is exactly how it started in 1984.

THE CHAIR: So it was largely that accreditation process—

Ms Walls: Yes, it was—

THE CHAIR: which was the end of it?

Ms Walls: Yes, it was the end of it.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions, thank you, Ms Walls, for appearing today.

Ms Walls: My pleasure.

THE CHAIR: It is greatly appreciated. A copy of the transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you so that you can have a look at it. Thank you for appearing today.

Ms Walls: Thank you.

LAWRENCE, MR MATT, Executive Director, University of Canberra Students Association Inc

THE CHAIR: Welcome, Mr Lawrence, to today's hearing of the education committee into the accommodation needs of tertiary education students in the ACT. I draw your attention to the privilege card which is on the table in front of you, just to make sure that you have read it and are aware of it.

Mr Lawrence: Yes, that is fine.

THE CHAIR: I will just emphasise that the proceedings are being broadcast and also recorded, so that you are aware of that. Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr Lawrence: I am very pleased to be here. We are possibly in a unique position, being both advocates for students and the operator of student housing. There are real issues around student accommodation in the territory. Some of those are driven not by institutions or the amount of accommodation but, rather, by the way we regulate tenancy laws in the ACT, but there are ways that we could be smarter about how we contemplate future development, particularly in the inner north and the Belconnen area, to make provision for student housing. Sometimes it falls off the end because it is not really akin to public housing in any way. It is a different, shorter term model that is required.

The other thing I would say is that we are growing increasingly concerned at some of the developments that have happened in the student housing market in the ACT over the past probably two or three years. We are seeing less than optimum accommodation answers provided for students. Student accommodation can build a real student experience and add value through programming in leadership and community building. There are a whole lot of positives that can come out of student accommodation, apart from having a box to put a student in at night. Some people in the ACT have been doing that for decades. We are pretty new to the scene. I hope that we do that too. Certainly the colleges at ANU have a long history of doing that kind of leadership development. It is a co-curricular exercise. It really is not just an accommodation problem. It is what do you do with the 18-year-old that you throw in the room at night?

THE CHAIR: My question relates to that a little. One of the things you have mentioned in your submission was how, over the last couple of years, there has been a move towards more apartment-style accommodation. You said that in the US and Canada they are moving away from that and going back to dorm-style accommodation. Is that the sort of concern that you have—that if it is an apartment there is not the student support in that environment?

Mr Lawrence: Part of the issue is that you take an 18-year-old, fresh out of high school or, in my experience, fresh out of schoolies week, put them in a room all by themselves and say, "You exist in this little box." Those apartment-style developments run a real risk of being suicide traps over time because there is the opportunity to shut the door and no-one is ever going to see you again. There is an interesting commentary out of the States over whether people should have bathrooms

in their rooms or whether they should be forced to interact at least at that basic level on a day-to-day basis.

I guess the concern we have about some of the apartment developments is that they are, in reality, two-bedroom apartments with five occupants who do not know each other when they move into the place and are put in things that you or I might properly regard as a small study or a sitting room. You throw a couple of bunk beds in and go, “It’s an extra room,” and then you charge what in reality is an exorbitant rent for that space. When you think that a four-bedroom house in Canberra would rent for between \$500 and \$600 a week, if you are a savvy student housing provider you can put five people in a two-bedroom apartment and charge them \$125 to \$175 a week. That is overpriced accommodation but it relies on uni students needing accommodation quickly and not having those things that a rental property manager wants to see from a potential tenant.

I remember a couple of years ago when I was looking for a house. I earn significantly more than a uni student, and it was hard work. You had to show up and stand in a queue and avoid the BMWs on the way out. There were people making outrageous offers to get pretty basic accommodation. Obviously uni students get pushed down that list when a property manager looks at them.

THE CHAIR: You have raised the concern about putting someone into an unfamiliar environment where potentially they do not have the supports. Have concerns been brought to you as a student association? Has there been an experience that has brought these concerns out in particular?

Mr Lawrence: Obviously UC had an experience some years ago with an international student in a flat in Belconnen. That was not organised student accommodation, but it is exactly the same model. She died and lay dead for many months before anyone noticed. I guess that is the real fear of that kind of model: the “lock the door and pay the rent by direct debit” kind of model. There is no interaction and there is no-one that says, “Good morning.” There is just none of that. It is very easy, if you are an 18-year-old that does not know the city and is not socially connected in any way, to fall off the face of the planet.

THE CHAIR: Are they concerns that have come to you as a student association or have you had family or students saying, “This is something we are experiencing”?

Mr Lawrence: Yes, we have heard those kinds of concerns. But obviously we also look at it from the outside and go, “What’s the risk here?” I think that case in Belconnen a couple of years ago particularly highlighted just how easy it is to fall off the radar.

THE CHAIR: Without the supports there—

Mr Lawrence: That is what that apartment-style living is about. Some people see it as an absolute upside that there is no interference in their life. They are young and independent and it is all very exciting. That might work well for many people, but if that is the only choice, I do not think it is a good choice.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: In terms of what you have available—and you may not have it in front of you—it would be interesting to know actually what you have got in terms of bed numbers on campus and what you provide off campus. Do you have that broken down?

Mr Lawrence: We provide 214 beds at Arscott House. There are now very close to 1,500 beds at UC, and I understand ANU has about 5,000 on campus and in associated colleges.

MR HANSON: So it is 1,500 on campus and about 214 off campus, is it?

Mr Lawrence: No, 1,500 in total.

MR HANSON: In total. Okay.

Mr Lawrence: UC had a head lease arrangement with various houses in the ACT. It ceased operating that at the point where it outsourced all of its student accommodation.

MR HANSON: Okay. In terms of demand, we heard from a previous witness that demand has tapered off a bit this year because of a decrease in international students. Have you found that?

Mr Lawrence: UC claims that international student numbers are reasonably stable. We have not noted a significant decrease in demand. I guess there are two sides to that demand question. You have got people who do not get a room and do not come to university in Canberra and then you have got people that accept the offer to come to UC or ANU and then live in inappropriate accommodation. It is really quite hard to get a handle on the precise number of people that are turned away or—

MR HANSON: Have you made any attempt to try and quantify that?

Mr Lawrence: There is a point in late January when we are making offers for Arscott House. There are only 200 beds. We have a list of up to 600 people that disappear over that last couple of weeks in January. I presume that many of them make decisions about studying elsewhere. That is why the universities—and ANU has done an excellent job of building new student accommodation—have a business interest in doing that.

MR HANSON: In terms of your business modelling, you would view that the lack of student accommodation globally across Canberra is impacting on your ability to grow the business at UC?

Mr Lawrence: Yes, I would absolutely say that. That is what the university say. I understand they are building new student accommodation at the Cameron Offices in Belconnen. That is about ensuring that there are rooms available for students to live in, because the territory market—if you want to call it that—of school-leavers is always going to be reasonably fixed. Every other student that studies at the ANU or UC needs necessarily to come from somewhere else. It is likely, then, that they need

accommodating.

MR HANSON: You have a guarantee, don't you, for students—

Mr Lawrence: UC does not.

MR HANSON: You do not have a guarantee?

Mr Lawrence: No. ANU is the only one that operated the guarantee. I think I raised it in the submission that, in some ways, ANU's guarantee demonstrates an American kind of approach to this, but it has been playing catch-up. It is only really now that it has met that target. An American university would not consider growing its student numbers until it had provided accommodation for those extra students. It is part of that development model, whereas here we just go, "We'll have 1,000 more students," and then we discover that we have got a housing crisis. Then we will put bunk beds in what were single rooms. It is a silly model. That is not just a Canberra thing; that is an Australian thing. It is based on the presumption that uni students in Australia do not tend to travel, whereas I would have thought in Canberra we need to face the reality that anyone other than our ACT school-leavers are necessarily going to travel to come to university.

MR HANSON: If you could hazard a guess at the quantum of what that is in terms of that gap, how many student accommodation places would you need before you would say that you are no longer impacting on your business model?

Mr Lawrence: It is a difficult question to answer, in part because figuring out the quantum of people that just say, "I'm not interested in coming because Canberra's an expensive place to live"—

MR HANSON: We won't hold you to it.

Mr Lawrence: I would have thought it is in the order of thousands of beds, and then you would have to figure out a growth model beyond that. This is made a little bit more complicated because universities next year will be free to enrol as many students as they want. So I suspect we will see pressure again because ANU and UC are both going to say, "We can handle everyone that wants to come." I guess you could figure it out by, if there are 10,000 or 20,000 students enrolled in Canberra universities, subtracting the number of ACT school-leavers and multiplying that number by three. You would get very close to what the out-of-town number was. They all need to be accommodated, and they are currently being accommodated in some way.

One of the other things we are saying is that ANU offers a first-year guarantee. One of the things that we have noted, having run Arscott now for 3½ years, is that, increasingly, second and third-year university students desire to live on campus. I was at university in the mid-90s, when you would live for one year on campus and then make some friends and get a share house. That is certainly no longer the case because those share houses are not there.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: Thank you. A couple of times you talked about the savvy student housing providers bunk-bedding students in multiples per room.

Mr Lawrence: Yes.

DR BOURKE: Who are they?

Mr Lawrence: There is a large development in Belconnen where they have done that. That got some media attention. But, by and large, they are private investors. If you go through particularly Bruce, near the AIS, there is any number of houses where they are really selling the room. As I understand it, there has been no change to the tenancy laws in the ACT to properly define what a boarder is, as opposed to a tenant.

I was going through this exercise the other day. UC is redeveloping Cameron Offices into student accommodation. They propose to have rooms that are dual occupancy, so you get a bed in a room that is three by three or thereabouts, up to 20 square metres. I spent some time looking at whether they would properly be tenants or whether they would be lodgers or boarders, and I can find no definition that excludes anyone from saying: “No, you don’t get a lease. What you get is an occupancy agreement that allows me to boot you out next week.”

The answer to your question is that it is anyone who has paid enough attention to notice that they can rent out their \$500 a week house in Kaleen, Bruce or Florey and, instead of renting it out for \$500 a week and being constrained by an agent and tenancy requirements, they can rent each of those bedrooms for up to \$200 a week and kick tenants out as they choose.

DR BOURKE: So it is individuals, private investors, doing this, or is there some sort of corporate involvement?

Mr Lawrence: There is a level of corporate involvement. The Uni Gardens in Emu Ridge attracted some attention earlier this year for unhappiness, largely amongst ANU students—I am not sure that a whole lot of UC students live up there—regarding suboptimal housing. They have basically built two and three-bedroom apartments and turned them into four, five, six or seven-occupant dwellings, which surprised me when I saw their model. I had only previously been exposed to a private model that UniLodge runs in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, where they are selling college-size rooms for around \$100,000 to private investors, to mums and dads, as part of their superannuation policies, whereas the Uni Gardens ones were going for \$350,000 or \$400,000. I was a bit surprised by that because I could not figure out how you would get the return that would be required on that investment. It turns out you get that return by putting more people than you would normally expect should live in a two-bedroom apartment in a two-bedroom apartment.

There is such demand for that that universities have signed on to putting their students in. So it is not even a matter of saying, “I’m going to put up a banner out the front and see whether I can get people to live here.” Universities were actively referring. ANU was paying for those rooms as part of the accommodation guarantee. And that is likely why it got media attention. But a whole lot of it is mum and dad investors that realise they have got a house in Bruce and they can make more money on it.

I raised in the submission the idea of head leases and the difficulty of doing that in the ACT. In the UK, the model that student organisations have used to resolve student housing issues is to go out and effectively rent 100 houses and then get students to live in them. That only really works in a depressed housing market, because what you are promising is surety of a tenant. Sure, they may not be your first pick of tenants, but there is a surety that the organisation that signs the lease is going to fix it all up at the end. At the point where you have got queues of people waiting for any rental house in Canberra, the idea that you want surety of rental income is a bit foolish and you would probably want a premium for handing them over. So that is a model that does not appear to work very well in this market.

DR BOURKE: Just to finish off on that topic, talking about overcrowding, surely students sharing rooms as a form of student accommodation has been around for several hundred years. Is there a particular standard that you would be ascribing to for square meterage per room?

Mr Lawrence: The US prison system requires 15 square metres per prisoner.

DR BOURKE: I was talking about Newman College at the University of Melbourne, designed by Marion Burley Griffin.

MR HANSON: Fifteen square metres per prisoner?

Mr Lawrence: Fifteen, yes. That is the federal prison requirement. Maybe we should treat students a little bit better. I am not horribly concerned by students sharing rooms. American students typically live that way, although they are designed as shared rooms. Commonly, you find that the beds are on either side of the room and then there is a study space in the middle. That is quite different from taking a second bedroom, putting in a couple of beds and saying, "It's a shared room." That is a very different student experience.

We use a piece of software to allocate rooms to students. They make the application through the website. It is an Australian company but they do extensive work in America. One of the things that they work the hardest on is building an algorithm to get people to share rooms. It is almost a dating service that needs to go on inside the computer to put two people that are likely to—

MR HANSON: Compatible.

Mr Lawrence: Yes, to get on, so you ask a whole lot of questions—

MR HANSON: You could run a dating service on the side.

Mr Lawrence: They reckon they can do it in the office that way. But that is a serious piece of work that lots of money has been invested in to get right, and I dare say that people offering that style of accommodation in the ACT are not putting that effort in to ensuring that the people that you throw together are in any way compatible, and they are not providing those kind of space requirements that you would probably consider would be appropriate for two 18 or 19-year-olds sharing a space.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned the tenancy laws in the ACT.

Mr Lawrence: Yes.

THE CHAIR: The Tenants Union are appearing this afternoon. They actually put in a submission and talked about probably what you talked about—occupancy. You talked about reform. One of the things they have raised is that there is not a standard definition for what an occupancy agreement is. As you said, it can be anything, really. Would you say that occupancy agreements are one of the areas that need reform?

Mr Lawrence: I think that is really serious reform that needs to happen now. It is not just that there is a grey area. In fact, anyone can be an occupant, from my reading of the act. There is no definition whatsoever that you need to be even a licensed boarding house to have occupants. There is no limitation on who offers it. If I offer an occupancy agreement and you accept it then that is what we have got. In fact, there are more limitations on who is or is not a tenant than there are on who or who is not an occupant, which seems the wrong way around, because the tenant obviously receives much more protection—and the benefit, even, of a standardised agreement.

THE CHAIR: They actually have that as well.

Mr Lawrence: Yes. We use occupancy agreements for our residents at Arscott House, and I think that is the appropriate method to use. They share facilities; there are all kinds of reasons why a college on a university campus would use that kind of document. But if you are renting to four people in a house, it seems to me bizarre that you are free to say, “Well, there’s a lot of demand and I have here this thing; you sign it,” and that’s it.

THE CHAIR: Are there any jurisdictions that do this sort of—

Mr Lawrence: There was an ACT inquiry into—

THE CHAIR: The boarding house—

Mr Lawrence: Yes.

THE CHAIR: That did actually—

Mr Lawrence: And that did actually list it.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Lawrence: Not wanting to get it wrong, I will refer you to—

THE CHAIR: I think Victoria and Queensland—

Mr Lawrence: Yes, Victoria and Queensland come to mind as people that have properly defined who gets an occupancy agreement. It is pretty much limited to people who operate a licensed boarding house which, in the ACT, would mean that

the health department might have some interest. That said, I have held a boarding house licence for four years now, and I cannot remember ACT Health ever coming to visit. I am pretty confident that we would get the tick, but I am not sure how rigorous their assessment of boarding houses is, particularly once licensed. One of the issues I was concerned about with the Cameron development is that it only has 40 car parks for 200-odd residents. I thought, “Well, that doesn’t appear to meet the requirements of the territory plan.” If there was appropriate testing by the health department or whoever in the future managed boarding houses, it might occur to them to count the number of car parks and wonder why it was 100 below what the territory plan—

THE CHAIR: But that might not always translate to how many people might be there. With students they might be people that catch public transport and do not actually have a car.

Mr Lawrence: The territory plan requires half a space for every bedroom in a boarding house, plus half a space for every employee, which seems to be reasonable. I work with uni students every day. They have an alarming number of cars. That would seem to me to be a logical test: are you in compliance with the territory plan—yes or no?” But no-one is actually doing that work. There is no fear that that is going to happen. You see it in some of the worst case boarding houses.

If the territory wants to be involved in fixing the problem in student housing, I do not propose for a minute that the territory should go out and build student accommodation. I think there are, however, things that you can do around dealing with those greyer areas of tenancy. The other thing that the territory could have at front of mind—and Lawson would be an obvious one because it is next to UC—is that there should be specific zoning for student accommodation provided in those developments. I run a student accommodation business. The cost of building new student accommodation is considerable. The cost of the land to build that student accommodation in the ACT is almost impossible.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: Yes. You have got 1½ thousand beds, ANU has got 5,000 beds and we heard this afternoon that CIT has got 76 beds.

Mr Lawrence: Yes.

DR BOURKE: Do you see any issues there?

Mr Lawrence: There is a requirement in the Arscott House lease between the university and the territory to provide 70 beds to CIT students on demand. I obviously have a sublease from the university. I have not had CIT students apply. I think we have one or two a year. I think CIT have some real difficulties around accommodation because of the time frames of a lot of their courses. If you are doing a course that requires you to do block training or your course only runs for three months or seven months, it is a difficult thing for us to absorb into our business model. If a CIT student comes to me and says, “I need accommodating between March and August,” it is not actually something that fits the business model of any of the university-based student accommodation providers in Canberra. What it means is having an empty room for

those other ends of the year.

I think CIT's problems are complicated. I do not know that they will be fixed, in terms of housing, by merging UC and CIT because that accommodation is designed around a university year—at UC, a 45-week year. Once you get smaller than that and stop guaranteeing the occupancy of those rooms over time not only does the financial model not work for me but also you are putting out someone that was prepared to live there for 45 weeks a year.

The issue for CIT might be that much of the student accommodation in Canberra that is older than the past couple of years was built by subsidy from the Whitlam government and progressing through to the Hawke government. Those beds were built with federal money and effectively gifted to the institutions. I note that UC has determined to privatise all of those beds that were gifted by the taxpayers of Australia to them. That is how that accommodation was built—it was federal money—understanding that regional students, in particular, needed to be accommodated at university campuses.

DR BOURKE: There are probably hundreds—

THE CHAIR: You have probably got time for one more question. I just thought I would let you know.

DR BOURKE: Is this my question?

THE CHAIR: Yes, it can be your question—a free gift.

DR BOURKE: There are probably hundreds, if not thousands, of empty rooms sitting in family homes around Canberra. How do you think that resource could be exploited to solve your problems?

Mr Lawrence: I guess it is an obvious answer, but I am not sure what the desire of the average Canberra family to have a random 19-year-old appear in their spare room really is. UC and ANU, and I am sure CIT, operate home stay programs for international students where people are compensated; it is a paid thing. It is not like there are thousands of people in a queue waiting for an international student to appear in their lounge room.

I would have thought the other concern would be around how appropriate the accommodation or, for that fact, the student was going to be for that kind of living. I am not sure how your university days were, Dr Bourke, but there was a point when I am not sure I would have inflicted myself at 18 on some random lovely couple from Giralang. One of the great things about university accommodation is the space it gives young people to grow and to grow up, and the space it gives them to make stupid mistakes in a somewhat protected environment that is not at mum and dad's house. There are consequences to mistakes, but I guess we aim to limit those consequences to be realistic rather than the way things go bad in the real world once you have graduated. I am not sure that I would wish that as an experience on the thousands of people of Canberra.

MR HANSON: I have got an image in my mind now.

Mr Lawrence: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We will not go there. We are out of time. Thank you, Mr Lawrence, for appearing before the committee today.

Mr Lawrence: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: A copy of the transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you so you can check it for accuracy.

Meeting adjourned from 3.00 to 3.16 pm.

PIPPEN, MS DEBORAH, Executive Officer, Tenants Union ACT
BARTLETT, MS LOUISA, Advice Worker, Tenants Union ACT

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Pippen and Ms Bartlett, for appearing before the committee today on the inquiry into the accommodation needs of tertiary education students in the ACT. I draw your attention to the privilege statement which is on the table in front of you. Are you aware of the statement and the contents of it?

Ms Pippen: Yes, we are.

THE CHAIR: One of the things I will emphasise about it is that the proceedings are being broadcast and recorded, just so that you are particularly aware of that in terms of the information you provide to the committee. Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Pippen: Okay. In our submission, we have provided an outline of the services provided by the TU since 1994, assisting tenants and others renting with advice and more recently with representation. Our contact with people renting provides us with an insight into the many issues that are faced by them.

Tertiary students have always been one of our main client groups. The issues presented by them range from affordability problems to repairs and issues with the condition of their accommodation, arbitrary eviction and problems having their bonds repaid to them. These are matters that all tenancy services across the country are well aware of and have detailed in various forms over time.

Issues that we in the ACT deal with that no other service in the country assists with are those arising out of co-tenancy situations where the disputes are between tenants. Particular trends we are very concerned about are the rise in effectively unregulated multi-tenanted and pseudo boarding houses, the lack of effective regulation of university accommodation and the dearth of truly affordable accommodation. Unscrupulous providers are also well aware that the tenants will be leaving the jurisdiction or the country and so will not be able to take action in relation to defending claims against bond and other money. Students are particularly vulnerable because of their lack of experience in renting, lack of awareness of rights and often reluctance to take any action if there are problems because of fear of retaliation by accommodation providers, agents or landlords.

Steps that we see that need to be taken are the development of effective regulations protecting students in all forms of accommodation and the provision of additional appropriate and truly affordable accommodation.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. You mentioned in your opening statement, Ms Pippen, some of the concerns around unregulated housing providers and also the fact that, as you have pointed out in your submission as well, often students are not aware of what their rights are. That is something which has come out in a number of the other submissions to the inquiry. You have listed tenancies, the different types and particularly occupancy agreements and the lack of consistency around that. What do you see as being the key area that needs to be looked into in terms of addressing some of the deficiencies in the current tenancy legislation, particularly where it refers to

students?

Ms Phippen: I think that the real gap is the regulation of the other types of accommodation which are the occupancies. When the occupancy provisions were introduced into our act, the provisions allowed for the regulation and development of standard agreements specific to different types of occupancies. So we had hoped that possibly the accommodation providers and the universities would see themselves as model providers and would be open to developing a standard agreement similar to a tenancy agreement, but a standard agreement that could be used by those providers and which recognised the differences between what their needs are, who the people living in their accommodation are and tenancies. The one part of the industry that did develop a standard agreement was the supported accommodation providers. That has not been regulated, but they were able to work out a standard agreement. That did not take much time or effort. So we were a bit disappointed in that.

THE CHAIR: So you are talking about the development of a standard agreement, in particular, because it has not come about, and it does need to be legislated and regulated because there is that gap there?

Ms Phippen: Definitely, yes. The occupancy provisions have been in for a while now. Because they are so broad, there is not really much to protect people. International students in particular are coming to Australia with no understanding often that there is any type of protection, that there are tenancy agreements. If they experience tenancy in any other form at home, it is often completely different from what it is here. Through our advice service, which Louisa could probably talk a little bit more about, we get many people calling about problems where they are occupants, and we need to do something about that.

THE CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Did you want to talk about that, Ms Bartlett?

Ms Bartlett: I think primarily the problem that I see when I speak to people is a lack of knowledge about the law. The problem with the occupancy principles is just that they are really broad, so they are obviously just principles. They are not codified in the way that the standard residential tenancy terms are, so that you can take someone to a specific clause and say, "That's what the landlord can't do."

If you just have occupancy principles, they are so broad that you can say, "Well, if ACAT was looking at this provision in your case, they may make a determination and they may find in your favour." But that lack of certainty, particularly for students who just have no knowledge of the legal process, means that you can say to them, "Well, this is what we think the tribunal might do," but it does not give them a lot of certainty when they are in a dispute with someone who they are living with. They need to have something which they can point to and say: "Here's what the legislation says. This is what I'm entitled to. You can't do what you're doing right now." So I think that is a big concern for us, that they are so broad.

MR HANSON: Have you looked at models interstate?

Ms Phippen: There are not any. We are one of the few jurisdictions that have any regulation at all in terms of boarders and lodgers. Most jurisdictions do not. Student

accommodation is exempted in every other jurisdiction from tenancy legislation. So they are operating in exactly the same way, in that there are agreements that each of the providers are coming up with and there is no real coverage or protection. The difference for people in our jurisdiction is that if there is a dispute, they can go to the tribunal to have it resolved, but there is nothing for the tribunal to base it on. There are no standards for them to base a decision on, which is the problem.

Ms Bartlett: With the way the legislation currently is, it is not 100 per cent clear that, for example, to evict somebody in an occupancy, you have to go to the tribunal to get an eviction order. It is clear if you have a tenancy that you need to go and get an eviction order. You cannot just say, “You need to leave.” If you give them notice in a tenancy they can abide by the notice or they can dispute it, and it is only finally determined by the tribunal.

With an occupancy, it is not 100 per cent clear that you have to go to the tribunal to have that eviction process gone through. So you have a lot of evictions. The biggest problem that we see is people who are just evicted unilaterally and told, “You need to leave in two days,” or they are even just locked out and their things are thrown on to the street. For international students who have particular difficulties and vulnerabilities in finding accommodation, it is a big concern.

MR HANSON: We have asked a couple of the witnesses this afternoon what they think the gap is for student accommodation. Do you have a sense of what it is—students that are struggling to find accommodation or are in substandard accommodation? What sort of quantum are we talking about? Is it in the hundreds? Is it in the thousands?

Ms Phippen: I do not know that we could put a figure on it. We get a lot of calls from students. We do not get calls from people having trouble finding accommodation because we are the service that they talk to when they are in accommodation. I do know that, when we go to the international student orientation days and we have stalls, people are always coming to us because they are finding it hard and we have to refer them on. Sometimes the accommodation officers at ANU do not turn up to those information days. Because they do not have any accommodation to provide, they do not turn up. I think it is a significant number of people, but I would find it really difficult to quantify.

What we see are the people in substandard accommodation. The slum landlord issue that happened 12 months ago is not a stand-alone example. We know of other properties where students are in big buildings and one property used to be a vet surgery. They are being adapted because landlords or property owners are seeing the need, the demand, there and they are filling it. It is really difficult for us to quantify. As we also said, we do not collect stats on whether or not someone is a student. That is another problem.

MR HANSON: If you see one of these buildings that you think have become a slum for students, what action do you take? What steps do you take?

Ms Phippen: We are in a difficult situation. Last year we saw people wanting something done about the condition of the property they were in, but then they saw

themselves being evicted. Many of those people we just lost and we do not know what happened to them. The few people that we kept in contact with were just in temporary accommodation and were left to their own devices.

It is not really an incentive for people to want to come forward and talk about it. It puts us in a difficult situation too. We have been approached by one person recently who was actually leaving a property, but then there was the concern expressed, "If I go to somewhere, all these people who I have been living with are going to be evicted from the property." It is a really difficult situation.

MR HANSON: If you were to report it, who do you report it to?

Ms Phippen: We could contact the Attorney-General.

MR HANSON: The Attorney-General?

Ms Phippen: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: Yes. You helped 2,808 clients in 2009-10. How many were tenants and how many were occupants?

Ms Phippen: The vast majority would be tenants.

Ms Bartlett: I think we see an increasing number of occupancy questions, particularly for students. I would say students would be the vast majority of occupancy calls.

DR BOURKE: Given that proportion and the nature of occupancy agreements, do you think more regulation would make any difference to the number of complaints?

Ms Phippen: I think that regulation would mean that there is some consistency out there. Students talk to one another. Over the years that we have had a standard tenancy agreement people have learned that there is a standard agreement and that there is something there. If there was a standard agreement or some regulation to bring that about then information would be out there that that is what it is and people would be able to easily access something like our website. Our website is very easy to access. The information is there. We have a standard agreement. We have everything there. When you talk about occupancy, it is all very difficult as to the types of information we give. It is difficult for us to understand, and we are people who work with it every day. For somebody who is coming with no experience whatsoever and trying to understand it, it is very difficult.

THE CHAIR: Do you think that if there was a standardised agreement, potentially the universities would then be able to say to the students who come in, "This is what a standard agreement should look like"?

Ms Phippen: Definitely.

THE CHAIR: "If you are going outside to look for accommodation, this is what you

need to look for”?

Ms Phippen: Yes. That is what we would be hoping for. When you look at the different websites—UniLodge and other places—often they do not have their standard agreements up on the website. Sometimes they do; sometimes they do not. When you are getting someone from outside the jurisdiction, outside the country, you are going to be requiring them to enter into an agreement about their accommodation. Having it up there clearly so they know what they are entering into would assist greatly.

THE CHAIR: I am sorry, Dr Bourke, I stepped in on your question.

DR BOURKE: That is all right.

THE CHAIR: Did you have more questions?

DR BOURKE: Yes, thank you. One of the things we have already talked about with other witnesses was the concept that there are probably of hundreds, if not thousands, of vacant rooms out there in family homes where students could stay. Do you think increased occupancy regulation is going to affect the potential to tap into that market?

Ms Phippen: I do not think so. Again, it gives clarity to both parties in those types of situations. I know that home stays are something that we have not heard much of in terms of our service and we have not had much contact on because people do not see themselves as being able to contact a tenancy service and get advice and assistance, even though they are actually covered now by our occupancy provisions in the act. All of those types of accommodation arrangements are actually covered. I think that any type of standard agreement just helps clarify things for both parties, so both parties go in knowing what is there and what is expected of them. Because there is provision for the different types of agreements to be developed, they can work together. Something can be developed that is broad enough to work within that difficult situation, which is someone living in someone else’s house. We often come up against that type of problem with co-tenancy matters, and we see it where tenants are living with landlords.

Ms Bartlett: I will just add to that. I think it would help with the resolution of disputes. When a tenant or an occupant can refer to something and say, “This is what the law says,” and they can say it quite clearly, it helps in the resolution of disputes. In a home stay situation if they call us up and we give them the advice, “Well, the principle is that a reasonable amount of time is supposed to be given before you are evicted,” that is not clarity. What is “reasonable”? We can give them some pointers on what is counted as reasonable, but they do not know. If they have something which says, “You need a minimum of two weeks before you can evict someone,” then, as Deb was saying, the people who have someone go into their home will know that they cannot just tell them they need to leave—they need to give them at least two weeks—and the people who are staying there also have that clarity.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am sorry, I came in after you started your preamble, so if I ask you a question I am asking for some clarification. The

service that you provide—do people have to become paid members of the tenants union?

Ms Phippen: No, not at all. We are funded through rental bonds—the interest on rental bonds. So any tenant has already paid for our services, effectively. There are restrictions on our advice. We do not advise landlords or real estate agents, we do not advise head tenants in relation to their tenants and we will not give advice in a situation where it will result in someone losing their housing, because we are there to keep them in their housing.

MR DOSZPOT: Did I hear correctly that you said you are not aware of how many students are amongst the tenants?

Ms Phippen: Yes. We know from just the experience of doing it. Louisa does four shifts of advice a week and I do one or two and supervise advice shifts. You get a feel for it, but it is not one of the statistics that we keep.

MR DOSZPOT: So you have acted for some students?

Ms Phippen: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: What is the difference between the issues that students face and the issues that standard tenants face? Are there differences there?

Ms Bartlett: I would say they are more vulnerable, particularly international students. International students face greater vulnerability, particularly in the Canberra market. I think they have great difficulty in finding accommodation. Often they cannot afford the university-provided accommodation, and they are not guaranteed it. Domestic students get the guarantee, often through ANU, that they will be provided accommodation. Then they still have to afford it. But international students often do not have that guarantee and then they are forced out into the private market. I think it is a lot more difficult for them in share housing situations. To find someone on allhomes and go to an interview is very difficult for an international student to do. I would say they are particularly vulnerable.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Just going back to some of the issues around tenancies, you have given some examples in your submission—some case studies that you have heard of or experienced. You listed one about fees. From your experience, has that been something that has primarily occurred with accommodation being run by universities or with providers—that there might be private providers providing uni-style accommodation? I think that is something which was brought up by the previous witness—Matt Lawrence from the University of Canberra Students Association. He talked about it being almost like taking advantage of the situation sometimes. That issue around fees or about putting extra beds in—is that something you have heard about in terms of expectations a student might have when they have come or signed up for accommodation and then they got something entirely different?

Ms Bartlett: Recently I heard there was a problem with the UC accommodation.

They were having trouble with their fire alarms. They had little cook stoves in their rooms and using the cook stoves automatically set off the fire alarm, which incurred a cost. If you set off the fire alarm, you had to pay for it because they had to send the fire people out. It was a significant amount of money—\$100 or something—that would be charged to the person. It was actually a physical problem with the way the building was built. You could not actually cook because it always set off the alarm. It was too close to the cook's stove or something like that. That is obviously a concern. If you are a tenant, you are not allowed to be charged anything apart from rent or bond. If you are an occupant—

THE CHAIR: You can be charged anything.

Ms Bartlett: Yes, there is no limit on it.

THE CHAIR: The issue you have got is about providing students off-campus accommodation with fees and where you might have a sign-on fee, but then all these other added costs come on. Is that something that is typical because, with the occupancy, like you said—

Ms Bartlett: Yes, there is no limitation.

THE CHAIR: You can do whatever you want, essentially.

Ms Bartlett: Yes. There may be something under unfair contracts. We have looked at some research on that. We have seen occupancy agreements where, for example, a tenant might move out of a property but a term of the agreement is that, even if it is a fixed term, say for 12 months, if you move out sooner than the 12 months, one of the terms we have seen repeatedly is that you might have to keep paying, even if they have somebody in to replace you. So even if there is no actual loss to the provider, they might have to keep paying 50 per cent or 20 per cent of the rent for the time that they should have been in for the fixed term, even though there is no actual loss, because they have got somebody else in.

Under tenancy law, you cannot do that, because there is no loss to the landlord if you have got an alternative tenant to come in and you have moved out. But we have seen these terms in occupancy agreements. It just says it is what they have signed and they think that is what they are required to do. It might be that ACAT would look at that provision and say, "Look, that's not reasonable," and consider it under the occupancy principles and not enforce it. I think it is quite likely that they would do that, but it is not clear for people who have signed it, and we cannot point them to anything and say, "Definitely that is what the tribunal would decide." So they may think that they have to keep paying it. Obviously, as Deb has said, students are particularly averse to conflict and that kind of legal process.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: I have got no other questions.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: Yes. What sort of principles of occupancy regulation would you like to see? What do you want?

Ms Phippen: I know this is something that has been talked about with the members of the tribunal and identified as an issue with them—the lodgement of bond. At the moment, if you have an occupancy agreement, there is no requirement for the bond to be lodged, and this particularly affects students where an agent, provider or landlord knows that they are going to be leaving the property and leaving the ACT or the country. If the bond has not been lodged, it is held by the individual and it is really difficult for tenants to get that money back. So the bond can be lodged—it is an option—but a lot of the occupants who are students would not know that.

I refer also to standard provisions around evictions, how people can be evicted and what the time frames are, provisions about privacy and access to people's private space or whatever it is that they are renting. Something about if there are rules—and most of these types of accommodation do have rules because people are sharing spaces—so that there is some process for how rules are developed or changed. One thing we know is that where there are house rules in different circumstances and the student occupants go in and agree that these are the house rules, they can be changed without any notice by the provider of the accommodation.

There should be something about having some sort of process around that, because you are effectively changing the terms of the contract that they have gone into. So there should be some sort of process that involves the students or says that the rules cannot be changed except in particular circumstances. They would probably be the main ones.

Ms Bartlett: We would definitely like to see that if you are evicting someone and there is a dispute about it, it has to be arbitrated by somebody. I am not certain whether it would be fully appropriate to go through the tribunal, but it is something that we see—that evictions just occur where people are basically put out into the street because it is not clear that if you are in a dispute with someone who is living with you and you are accepting rent from them, even if they are an occupant, you cannot just evict them and put them out into the street. As a matter of public policy and safety, it should be arbitrated by someone apart from the parties, just because it is going to get messy if you do not have that. So that would be something we would be very interested in seeing.

DR BOURKE: Do you have a model occupancy agreement on your website?

Ms Phippen: No, we do not provide anything like that. If providers or people ask us, we refer them to the SAAP occupancy agreement, the supported accommodation agreement that was drawn up by the SAAP sector. That is what we would send out if people were asking about a standard agreement. With respect to the way that was developed, it was basically a matter of all the providers of accommodation sitting down and looking at the standard tenancy agreement, adapting that tenancy agreement and just making changes to the things that they saw as not quite fitting in with the needs of the people—and that they are providing temporary accommodation, shared accommodation and those types of things.

That agreement does capture a lot of the things that student accommodation would be looking at and would be needing. So that would be a guide, but we are not about to be putting something up on our website. It is not a standard agreement. It is an independent agreement, so we are not going to be drawing up agreements.

DR BOURKE: That is why I said “model”.

Ms Phippen: Yes. If people ask specifically, we will give them the SAAP agreement, but we are not going to be putting anything up.

MR HANSON: What does “SAAP” stand for?

Ms Phippen: The supported accommodation assistance providers. It is the refuges and emergency accommodation providers.

MR HANSON: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Anything further, Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: No, that will do.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Madam Chair. I heard you say that you are not aware of how many students there are in tenancies; is that correct?

Ms Phippen: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: What about the number that you have acted for? Would you be able to determine how many students you have acted for?

Ms Phippen: No. We have only just started representing people, so it has not been that many. Our service is primarily a one-off advice service. We do have face-to-face advice and minor assistance, so we will assist people and have appointments with them in particular circumstances, and we do talk to a lot of students and make face-to-face appointments with students who do not have English as a first language, because there is a lot of difficulty there. But, as I said, we do not have anything that flags that someone is a student or not. When an advice worker is writing out the advice—because we have records of each advice we give—it is not necessarily something that they would write in the advice. Often we probably would, but I could not categorically say that we do.

MR DOSZPOT: What I am trying to get at is: is there a great demand for this sort of service? If you have looked at 2,808 clients, I would presume that, in the course of talking to them, you would more or less have to discover whether they are students or not, would you not?

Ms Phippen: We would, but that is the individual advice worker, and it is whether it is recorded or not. It is not something that is recorded. So it is not something that we could pull up in our demographic stats, that we can call up through our database. It is

not something that is recorded.

MR DOSZPOT: The reason I am asking is: from your experience of the ones you may have dealt with who are students that you are aware of, is there such a difference between the type of issues they are coming to you with and standard tenants? Are they much the same issues or are they—

Ms Phippen: Because a lot of the work we are doing with them is the occupancy stuff that we are seeing, there are those differences. When it is people talking to us about straight tenancy problems, sometimes they might get a little bit complex, but you have the tenancy agreement, the standard terms, and it is a lot simpler to deal with. When we are talking to students and they are in occupancy situations, there is nothing that we can go back to that is clear that means that we can assist them easily. So they are often the more complex matters that we deal with. But, then again, I could not pull it out, because we do not—

MR DOSZPOT: Sure. Having this sort of discussion, would it prompt you to re-examine and help your ability to support these people if you had a differentiation so that you could say, “We’ve helped so many students, so many people”?

Ms Phippen: One of the things we do is we will take a month and ask specific questions of people and so we could—

MR DOSZPOT: I am certainly not telling you how—

Ms Phippen: No, I think that is a useful thing. We are always interested in learning more about the types of needs that are out there. Because this has been raised as an issue, it could be something on which we look at collecting that amount of information. It is difficult for us to collect the stats from people because often it is just one-off advice, so we have to constrain the amount of questions we are firing back at people. It probably would be useful.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions, thank you very much for your time, Ms Phippen and Ms Bartlett. A copy of the transcript of today’s hearing will be sent to you so that you can check it for accuracy. Thank you very much.

GINNIVAN, MS LEAH, President, Australian National University Students Association

WYKES, MR SHAUN, General Secretary, Australian National University Students Association

THE CHAIR: I would like to thank Ms Ginnivan and Mr Wykes for coming to speak to the committee today for our inquiry into the accommodation needs of tertiary education students in the ACT. I draw your attention to the privilege statement which is on the desk in front of you, just to make sure that you have read that and are aware of the information in there.

Ms Ginnivan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I will draw your attention to one particular aspect of the proceedings, that everything is recorded and we are also being broadcast, just so that you are aware of that when you are providing information to the committee. Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Ginnivan: I wrote the statement, so thanks very much for the opportunity to be here today. The ANU Students Association exists to represent students to the university and to the broader Canberra community. There are about 9,000 undergraduate students that we represent, and there is a separate association for post-grads. We sit on around 20 university committees and we help in the formulation of various university policies, both academic and more general. We run a free legal and welfare service for students, as well as helping out with appeals and that kind of thing with the university. We run social events and administer all the different clubs and societies on campus as well.

Accommodation is an issue that concerns us greatly at the students association. We hear very frequently from students who are struggling to make ends meet. A recent survey that we conducted across all undergraduate students showed that, of all the respondents, about 34 per cent said they do not earn enough money to take care of basic needs and afford common expenses such as mobile phone costs, reasonable diet and social outings.

When we asked this question, many additional students who said that they could afford that said that they barely or just had enough and were only able to make those ends meet through support from their families or partners and would not have been able to afford it without that support. Up-front costs with accommodation are particularly stressful around February when students move in to start university and have to pay for things like textbooks and the costs of establishing a house or moving into a residence on campus.

A large percentage of students at ANU undertake employment to make ends meet, which is around 70 per cent of respondents in our last survey. Of all respondents, about 42 per cent of students have missed class due to employment obligations, with 10 per cent saying they regularly or always miss class for employment purposes. Obviously this has a pretty huge impact on students' ability to make the most out of their time at university and to be able to really be students, which is what we are all

here for.

While ANUSA does not represent post-graduate students directly, we know that one issue for them in particular is international post-graduate students who often cannot get to Canberra until right before they have to start classes, they are trying to look for houses at the same time and they have a lot of difficulty in being able to find affordable, secure accommodation quickly, which they need to do. ANU has a small amount of accommodation that is allotted to them, which I think is in the ANU's submission separately, but that is not enough for them. I have spoken to a lot of post-graduates who come in looking for accommodation and there is not really much we can do or say, apart from saying, "Go to allhomes, or ask around." There is a shortage of accommodation that is appropriate for them and, in particular, for post-graduate families. So that is another issue.

We think that ANU has some great accommodation options but that it is not adequately addressing the diverse needs of ANU students, and probably CIT, UC and other students as well. ANU has one of the worst records of all universities in Australia at attracting low socioeconomic status students, and that is partly because of the way that low SES is classified, but also because the cost of living and renting is so much higher here than in other states. There is no doubt that those costs are a deterrent for capable students who have been offered a place at ANU but cannot make the transition. That has a lot to do with the broader picture of student income support that is a federal issue, not a state one, but I think that is part of the context that we operate in.

We would like to see a more holistic approach to student accommodation in the ACT. The ANU's policy is one part of the equation, but it does not just stop at first or second year, and the rental market is, as you would have heard already, very tight for students. A lot of native Canberrans tell us that they want to move out and save the maybe 30-minute drive that they have coming from their parents' home to university, but they cannot afford it. Many real estate agents explicitly exclude students from applying for properties because they know that public servants or whoever else are going to be able to apply and take that place. So students are denied even applying.

We are also definitely in support of more dense housing in the ACT. I know that is a bit of a politically touchy issue sometimes, but there is definitely a lack of affordable high-density accommodation, we think, particularly in the inner north. There is a lot of development that is going on at the moment, but it is not really appropriate for student needs. We find that students are prepared to take on less fancy accommodation that costs less; that meets our needs fine as long as it is safe, secure and preferably in the company of other students as well.

One issue that the ANU deals with a lot is that there is a first-year guarantee, which is for all interstate and international students offered a place in their first year, but because of the difficulty later year students have in moving out of the on-campus residences, that is very difficult to maintain, so the ANU has had to take on additional properties, like Lyneham Motor Inn, which was Lyneham Hall for a while, and Uni Gardens in Belconnen. But as long as it is difficult for second, third and fourth-year students to move out of accommodation to somewhere else that is decent, they are not going to move out of on-campus accommodation, which creates this gridlock, I guess,

for first-year students and others coming into the ACT for the first time.

We are also quite supportive of projects like the Canberra Student Housing Cooperative, which I have been involved in for about a year now. Some other people from that are coming in to speak, I think, at the next session of this inquiry. We think that models like that are really worth looking into for both the ANU and the ACT government. We have already been looking into that with some ACT housing organisations. That is probably it from me for the moment. Shaun, do you want to add anything?

Mr Wykes: Overall, we think some of the things that could come out of an inquiry such as this includes looking at how to create more housing density that is affordable and suitable for students in the inner north, so not being isolated in one-bedroom apartments but more group-style living that creates a community, both for first-year students and for students that Leah was talking about that have to move out of on-campus accommodation. There is also the matter of using existing community housing stock that we have in the ACT to make it more accessible to students, be it Havelock House or the area that is looking to be redeveloped up Northbourne Avenue, looking at how that can be used for student accommodation. There is the issue of real estate agents and the exclusion of students from the housing application process and the difficulty that arises there.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I wanted to ask about that issue you have raised in your submission, and that you have both raised there, about real estate agents excluding students. Is that the story that you hear back from students that might be coming to you for assistance—that that is commonly happening?

Ms Ginnivan: That happens, but just as frequently you will look at an ad for a house and it will say “no students” or “no groups”. And that basically means they will not consider your application. But we also hear from many people who have maybe tried to find their first house, they go there and there are 50 other people there and they are all public servants. Obviously, most real estate agents will preference them automatically. So, yes, that happens a lot, particularly around February when everyone is looking.

Mr Wykes: It happens a lot that real estate agents might not even be explicit, but the students do not get a house, and I have heard of people that have called up and asked what the issue was and have said, “Can I have some feedback?” and the real estate agents generally say, “No, I can’t tell you anything.” So, even if it is not obvious that they are excluding, I think they do it in quite subtle ways as well.

THE CHAIR: This is a difficult question but what would be one way of dealing with that situation? Do you think it is a matter of having standardised processes that they have to adhere to? How do you think that particular issue should be addressed?

Ms Ginnivan: I think it is probably more of a supply and demand issue. I do not think there is any way you can really compel real estate agents to accept students over professionals. But it is because there is so much competition that they are going to take their pick of residents, which is good for them but not so good for us.

THE CHAIR: One of the issues that relates to that—and this has come up; the UC Students Association talked to us today, and it has been in other submissions—is that sometimes you get a situation where some people take advantage of that situation and say, “We can see a gap here; we’ve got a house; we’ll rent it out to however many students,” and people get taken advantage of in that process. Is that something you have heard of as well?

Ms Ginnivan: Yes, definitely. Our legal officer, in particular, works for us three days a week and is a lawyer, and he deals with a lot of incidents like that, particularly with international students. There was a case earlier this year. There have been a few high profile media stories about it, but it is more common than you would think, even just by seeing that. I know of at least a couple of times that has happened this year where people have been living in a five-bedroom house with 10 or 11 people and paying \$150 each or something like that; it is not as if it is substantially reduced.

Also, a lot of students are living in houses where the contract has not been properly done, so people will be living on something that has been passed on from generation to generation of students. If they complain about something, the landlord is in a position to say, “Well, I’ll just find someone else if you’re not happy with the accommodation that’s offered.” We have had a few cases like that as well. Landlords refuse to make repairs and that kind of thing because it is easy to find another student who will take the place, especially if it is on the cheaper side of things.

Mr Wykes: I think that with students that are covered by the tenancy act, there are lots of avenues to take your landlord to ACAT in order to follow up when they do not do something. But I think landlords often are switched on enough to know that students probably do not have the time, the resources or the kind of knowledge to take their landlords to these bodies. I think they know that students are a good group to take on and then know that a lot of the laws, even though they are there, are not necessarily going to be enforced against them.

THE CHAIR: We have just heard from the Tenants Union that, because most students come under occupancy agreements, they are actually not even covered. Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: Can I congratulate you on your submission. It is very comprehensive. Obviously a bit of work went into that, so well done. Obviously supply and demand is the big issue, and on page 5 you talk about the anticipated increase in demand, at the top of the page. Could you expand on that? You talk about 1,000 beds being open next year, but you do not think that is going to meet demand. Have you had discussions with the university? We might have to follow it up with them as well. What do you see as an increase in student numbers and what do you see as the unmet demand, as a quantum?

Ms Ginnivan: Yes. I am not sure what 1,000 beds refers to here. There is a fourth UniLodge building that is being opened up in Childers Street which is going to have 440 beds. That probably included what was opened up this year already with Warrumbul, which is the third UniLodge building. The higher education sector is being deregulated at the moment, which means that the ANU, like other universities, is in a position to set its own student numbers. The funding will match the student

numbers so there are more incentives for a university like ANU to take on more students than there would have been in the past.

While I think it would be ill advised for the ANU to take on a lot more students, we expect the numbers are going to continue to grow by about two or three per cent, which is what I think is in the strategic plan the ANU has. For example, this year they were over enrolled by about two per cent, but nearly everyone who was in accommodation wanted to stay, plus there was additional demand from first-year students. There were a lot of people who were placed out in temporary accommodation in Lyneham and UniGardens this year.

It looks like it is probably going to be okay for next year, but there is also an issue where a lot of the ANU's housing stock—Fenner Hall out at Northbourne, Burton Hall and Garran Hall on Daley Road—on campus are getting quite old. They have been around since I think the early 1970s. Because of the way the housing codes are, if you renovate a bit of it, you have got to redo a whole lot of it. The ANU are facing a budgetary shortfall to address those costs to renovate it. In the meantime there will be 200 or 300 fewer beds. I am not sure how they are planning on covering that shortfall at the moment.

As for the long term, we have been arguing that there should be more catered accommodation on campus, because that is where there is a lot of demand. If you look at the application figures for the ANU, a lot of people apply for Bruce Hall and the other ANU halls that are catered than can currently be accommodated there, particularly people who are living out of home for the first time and maybe are not great cooks or whatever yet. It is a bit more expensive, but there is a lot of demand for it. We think that should be investigated.

MR HANSON: Have the university indicated that they are going to meet that demand or are they going to investigate that?

Ms Ginnivan: I do not think it is a priority at the moment. They have indicated that it is a longer term thing.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: Thank you. You say that, despite the fact that we have got good tenants legislation and this tenant regulation, landlords do not bother complying with it because they see students as a soft touch when it comes to enforcing their rights. We have heard submissions, or a submission, that occupancy rights should be more codified and more regulated. Do you think landlords are going to be any more attentive to those if we did that than they are currently to the tenancy laws?

Ms Ginnivan: I will admit that occupancy and tenancy laws are not really my forte, so I am not across the detail of what they currently are, apart from my own personal experience with them. I think that it comes down to education, particularly for students, in knowing what your rights are and what you need to look for when you are first moving out. In answer to your question, I think that is a pretty complex issue and you do not just change the laws without letting students know that they can take these things up and prosecute if their rights are not being considered. That is really

important as well.

Mr Wykes: As Leah was saying before on the issue that people do not follow things up because their landlord might not let them come back and threaten them with being able to bring in other students, it really depends on what the laws are changed to. It is difficult, but perhaps there is a way to take out the threat of a landlord saying, “Well, I won’t have you back next time,” or something like that. That is a very hard law to create and to enforce, but I think that is part of the reason. It is about education. People do not know what their rights are and they do not know how to undertake it. People think of the law and going to some tribunal as being a very expensive process and also, on top of that, even if they do that, successfully or unsuccessfully, because housing is so hard to get in Canberra, they do not want to threaten their chance of renewing their lease. I think if you take your landlord there, they are very unlikely to renew your lease. These are inherent issues and it will take a lot of intelligent people to think of really hardy solutions. If we can think of them, it will make a big difference.

DR BOURKE: ANU has got, what, about 5,000 rooms?

Ms Ginnivan: I think it is about 4,000 at the moment.

DR BOURKE: Of that order?

Ms Ginnivan: Yes, 4,500 student beds.

DR BOURKE: About 4,000 to 5,000. CIT has got 75.

Ms Ginnivan: Yes.

DR BOURKE: Would you like to comment on that?

Ms Ginnivan: My understanding is that CIT has a lot more local students than ANU, but I am not sure. It is probably a problem that UC and CIT students face in general in trying to find public rental properties. ANU has a lot of international and interstate students. About half are undergraduates and there are postgraduates so the needs are a bit different. I would not know much about CIT’s specific situation, apart from that. I assume that their students have as much trouble finding rental properties as ANU’s do.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Madam Chair. I echo Jeremy’s comment about your submission. It is excellent. You have covered a lot of ground. Is there any contact between the ANU association and the University of Canberra or the CIT? Do you have contact? Do you share the same types of problems? Do you try and find a common solution at all? Is that possible?

Ms Ginnivan: Yes. We have quite a bit of contact with the UC students association. We are both members of the National Union of Students, which I do not think CIT is at the moment because it is like a technical education institution. The student association president is also the ACT NUS president. Housing on campus is an issue

for students in probably most universities. They have done a lot of work on rent assistance and backup on a federal scale and we liaise with them quite a lot. We had a housing forum last week at ANU where they spoke, as well as some representatives from ANUSA and the university, from the co-op. There are definitely common problems.

Mr Wykes: The only thing I would say is that, even though we have that relationship, the accommodation is very different for us and UC, especially, because we obviously need inner north, preferably Lyneham, Ainslie, O'Connor—that kind of area—whereas UC students are looking a lot more at Belconnen, Bruce—that kind of area. I guess that gets to the issue of public transport. If the public transport system was a lot stronger in Canberra then we could look at having housing that could help us both, but with the issue at the moment we really need two different regions, basically.

MR DOSZPOT: You mentioned that you have had this housing symposium or seminar. Did that shed any more light on the question that Jeremy asked before about the unmet need? Are you aware what shortage there is if you add all the three institutions together? I know it is not your role to do that, but has any information like that come out of your discussions?

Ms Ginnivan: Not in a quantitative way, no. I think it would be interesting to do that. Just anecdotally in terms of UC students, there is more housing that is available out in the Belconnen region than there is in O'Connor and Turner, for pretty obvious reasons. At the moment, UniGardens, which is a place that ANU is renting for a year, is mainly for UC students. It was empty at the beginning of the year so the ANU took it over. Now it has been half sold back to UC, for example. So that is a facility that is kind of shared.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I was just going to ask about the issue you raised earlier where catered accommodation is one of the areas in greatest demand. You mentioned in your submission communal-style accommodation and that that is often something which students want and need, particularly first-year students.

Ms Ginnivan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Is that the feedback you have got from students? Also, are there any disadvantages for students being in more apartment-style accommodation? Are there any concerns that might have been expressed around that?

Ms Ginnivan: Throughout the year several students have come to me in my office and have said, "I'm living at UniLodge," which is the apartment-style accommodation, "But I don't know anyone. How would you suggest I get to know people? How do I meet people?"—and that kind of thing. There are social programs at UniLodge. There is a lot of really strong community that is building in some parts of it, but it is just not as easy to meet people in that sort of situation as it is when sharing a meal with them three times a day. Particularly for first-years coming to Canberra, it can be a pretty isolating if you do not know anyone and you do not have anyone from your school. Class can be a hard place to meet people as well. There is a lot of demand for the

catered accommodation. We have not fully processed our survey but, when we do, I would be really happy to send that to you.

THE CHAIR: That would be great.

Ms Ginnivan: It talks about preferences as well. The ANU did one earlier in the year that has that information, so that might be something to ask them about when they come in next week.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Ginnivan: What was the rest of the question, sorry?

THE CHAIR: The UC students association expressed some concern about apartment-style accommodation as well and the problems—

MR HANSON: The pastoral sort of care.

THE CHAIR: Yes, and the isolation that might be experienced. Is that the sort of issue that has been brought to you? There does seem to be a bit more of that style of accommodation being developed.

Ms Ginnivan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Is that a concern for you in terms of the feedback you get from students?

Ms Ginnivan: An issue that I think has swayed the ANU has been the NRAS money that it has got for building these four buildings. That is for a dwelling, which is something to do with the kitchen.

THE CHAIR: Yes, NRAS has impacted.

Ms Ginnivan: That has affected the kind of accommodation that has been built, rather than necessarily student demand. I think that if you asked a group of ANU students what would be their ideal housing situation they would say it would be something that is close, affordable, with other students, fairly safe and quiet so they can study—that kind of thing—rather than a fancy apartment on their own. That is definitely the sort of anecdotal evidence that we get. That is what I am beginning to see from the survey that we have just completed as well. People are looking for that connection with other students, particularly in their first and second years.

THE CHAIR: Maybe it is a matter of federal processes actually recognising that as well.

Ms Ginnivan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: And encouraging that to be built.

Ms Ginnivan: Definitely. But NRAS was not initially intended to be student

accommodation. I think that is one of the issues that have occurred as a part of that.

THE CHAIR: That is a very good point, yes.

Mr Wykes: I would just say that, with apartment-style versus catered accommodation, even non-catered—like Burton, Garran and Fenner—as Leah was talking about before, it is just the way they are set up. Eating together is a really important component of catered accommodation, but even in the non-catered halls they have got corridors and rooms and you kind of know if someone has not come out of their room for a while; whereas, when people are in apartments, especially one-bedroom apartments, it is hard to really monitor and follow. It is hard to get people out. When you are cooking for yourself and you have got your bathroom in your room, it is much more difficult—as you can imagine—to get people to interact.

MR HANSON: Have there been efforts to try and make it more collegiate and import those sorts of catered models, or even the ones that are not, so that you actually have got more of a sense of belonging, even though it is an apartment? You are not going to get around that. These things have been built and they are a reality.

Mr Wykes: Yes.

MR HANSON: Have efforts been made to try and retrofit that with the sort of culture that you get in some of those residential colleges on campus?

Ms Ginnivan: Yes, it is happening, but it is happening slowly. When the UniLodge buildings were built they were intended for postgraduate students, but because of the first-year guarantee ANU were compelled to put a lot more first-years in them than initially they would have preferred. Partly because of that—and, I guess, from work that we and other students organisations have been doing with the ANU—they have upped the budget for pastoral care. Next year all the UniLodge buildings will have a sub-dean figure who will be in charge of the culture and will help to foster a sense of community. In the fourth building, which will be open next year, they have put a bit more common space in and there is a rooftop garden. There is going to be a dining hall. That will definitely be the best of the four UniLodge buildings, but it is still not the model that you—

MR HANSON: It is not ideal, but they have made an effort to try and do the best with what they have.

Ms Ginnivan: Yes.

MR HANSON: And there is no scope to—it might be a question for the uni—to retrofit the others so that they can be closer? I have not been out to the buildings.

Ms Ginnivan: I doubt it, but that would be a question for them.

DR BOURKE: But there is still going to be a demand from some students to not be in a communal situation because they do not like it?

Ms Ginnivan: Absolutely. I guess it is just a question of numbers, though. There are

going to be 2,000 apartment-style beds out of 4,000 in total—actually, it will be more than that when you include the shipping container wing of Ursula Hall and University House. The majority of accommodation that is being built is this apartment-style living, which some people strongly prefer. That is fine, but I do not think it is where the unmet demand is at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: I just wondered—reflecting on my experiences—whether there is some cyclical demand as to what students want in accommodation. I went to college-style accommodation when I was at university in the 1970s and it was very hard to get people to go and live there. They all wanted to go out and live in share houses or on their own.

MR HANSON: You were all hippies back then, mate.

Ms Ginnivan: Was it cheaper?

DR BOURKE: Perhaps it was your experience too, Jeremy. I wonder whether there may be some sort of cycle happening. Do you have a comment on that?

Ms Ginnivan: I think that different students have different needs. There is definitely some demand for the apartment-style accommodation, but there is a lot for catered colleges and there is a lot for rental properties as well. ANU is in a pretty different situation to many universities around the country in terms of the amount of accommodation it provides. It should definitely be noted that there are more students living on campus at ANU than at any other university, as a percentage, so it is pretty unique. If you are a first-year student, if you have got a family or if you are an international postgrad who wants a PhD in three years, you are all going to want different things. We are seeing a trend towards one kind of model that we think does not really suit undergraduates in particular. That is our main issue, I would say.

MR HANSON: I guess they are the ones that are most impacted?

Ms Ginnivan: Yes.

DR BOURKE: But that is coming as a drive from your university.

Ms Ginnivan: Which is?

DR BOURKE: The single-unit accommodation.

Ms Ginnivan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Yes, but NRAS has actually had an impact on what has been pursued as well, which you noted.

Ms Ginnivan: Yes. Students will still take up that accommodation if it is the only thing they can find when they first get here. I have spoken to many students this year who maybe got into a single studio at a UniLodge building at around \$250 a week, not

including utilities or anything like that, for the first year and have really struggled to be able to afford it, meet people and all that kind of stuff. That room might have been appropriate for someone else, who would have loved it, but for that particular person it was not appropriate, it was not affordable and it did not help them get the most out of university.

It is just a matter of different needs, I think. Definitely the need for affordable accommodation has not really been pursued by the ANU in the way we would like. But there are broader issues that the ANU is operating in, like the rental context. If more later-year students were moving out of the \$165 non-catered accommodation, more first-years could move into it and have that experience, but there is nowhere for those later-year students to go. It is just very tight.

THE CHAIR: All right. I might go to probably one final question from Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you. We seem to be stuck on this unmet need area. That seems to be the most nebulous thing; nobody can put their finger on it. You mentioned the 1,000 new beds opening. Is there any register of people who come to you and say, “We can’t get accommodation on campus. We’re going off campus”? Is there any such registration?

Ms Ginnivan: The ANU have that information so that when they make an offer and it is rejected they can keep a track of that. We do not have anything to do with that process. You could ask them about that.

MR DOSZPOT: That should be able to give a bit of an indication as to what sort of unmet need there is for your university. That would help with planning, I guess.

Ms Ginnivan: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: If we took that example to the other university and to the CIT, maybe we could get a clearer picture. I am asking that; I am not saying it.

Mr Wykes: I think the university is aware, to a certain extent, of the demand for catered accommodation, but I think this option of privately run apartment-style accommodation is easier for the university to a certain extent. I do not think it is the issue of the university not knowing about the demand and then not being able to react to it. I think it is the choice it is making, even knowing about the demand.

Ms Ginnivan: One example that happened this year that I am sure the ANU will tell you about was when they had to rent temporary accommodation to meet their first-year guarantee at UniGardens and Lyneham. They were only able to offer it to people about a week or a couple of days before class started. I think they had projections for around 300 students who would come and live in these two different buildings, but because it was offered so late and it was out in Lyneham and UniGardens, people had never heard of it before and did not take it up—or maybe they did not come to ANU or maybe they found a rental property. I do not personally know that information. A lot of people moved in. The ANU took several weeks to put in washing machines. People were walking to Dickson with their washing and doing their washing. They did not have the internet for a long time.

A lot of people just cancelled their contracts, paid a cancellation fee and drifted off into accommodation somewhere else, or maybe went back home—because it was international students as well. There were all these empty beds at these two places that the ANU did not fill. I do not think they tried very hard to fill that accommodation. I do not think they offered it to UC or CIT students when they probably could have. Then a week before classes started, they announced they were closing Lyneham Hall. They are in that process now. That is an example of how it can get really complicated. I think there are solutions that we probably should be looking at when we know there are a lot of students who are struggling to find accommodation. There is accommodation available at that place, but the ANU are not making it a priority to offer it to people.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, once again, for appearing before the committee today. A transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you so you can check it for accuracy. We appreciate your coming here.

The committee adjourned at 4.28 pm.