

Simon O'Kane

Hello everyone,

As an elected officer of the University of Bath Students' Union's Postgraduate Association, a friend of University graduates who have since taken up permanent residence in the city and someone who hopes to do so myself, I would like to talk about the diversity of young people who live in HMOs. It has been widely reported and even confirmed in the feasibility study that occupants of HMOs are a much wider range of society than just students.

However, even within the student population there is a vast range of student identity with different housing needs. First year undergraduates and non-EU postgraduates are entitled to purpose-built accommodation, while continuing undergraduates, exchange students, mature students and EU postgraduates are expected to seek housing in the private sector. The majority of continuing students find their housing for the next academic year around January; these are the earliest group to look.

Later in the year, new postgraduates from within the EU and undergraduate exchange students begin to look for their accommodation. Due to the application process, it is not possible for new postgraduates to "house-hunt" at the same time as undergraduates, as they don't know where they will be based for their study. This already leaves them at a disadvantage when finding appropriate housing. It is common for postgraduates to still be looking for suitable accommodation just days before their course or research begins. A decrease in housing availability will make Bath less attractive to postgraduate students.

Having already completed an undergraduate degree and experienced independent living, it is unlikely that postgraduate students (and mature students for that matter) are perceived as a problem by neighbours, indeed it is unlikely that they are very distinguishable from groups of young professionals.

Alongside this, it again proves contradictory to the Council's initiatives to increase graduate retention. While the figures on this are unknown, many students build lives for themselves while studying and remain in Bath after graduation. One of my best friends now lives in Oldfield Park and works for a food manufacturing company in Bristol as a microbiologist. He has lived with various housemates over the years, many of whom grew up in Bath and have never been to university. Other graduate friends of mine have gone on to be teachers and software designers. This is before I even mention the many postgraduates who now work for the University as postdoctoral research staff.

This again suggests that an Article 4 Direction will negatively affect a group of residents of Bath, without solving the problems it is hoped to.