

Online focus group discussion guide

Homes fit for Study

Online focus group discussion guide

1. INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

- We're conducting this research to find out more about students' experiences living in rented accommodation so we can campaign nationally on the issues you're facing and support your students' union to do the same locally.
- You may have completed a survey on this issue earlier this academic year. This group will cover similar topics, with a particular focus on your experiences in your current accommodation. There is plenty to cover, but we're really interested in hearing about your experiences in detail so please answer the questions with as much detail as possible. We'd also like you to be as open as you feel comfortable.
- NUS' research team adheres to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct so all views provided will remain strictly confidential and won't be attributed to you personally. There are no right or wrong answers, we're really keen to hear your thoughts, opinions and experiences.
- The online group will automatically keep a record of everything you say, but this is just to help us with the analysis. As we said just now, nothing you say will be attributed to you.
- The payment to thank you for your time will be paid via bank transfer after this group. You'll receive a link to a secure page on NUS' website to allow us to collect your details and make the payment. If you have any issues, please get in touch with us after the group.
- Is everyone ok with this, or does anyone have any questions before we start?

2. RESPONDENT INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

- **Great. I'd like to kick things off with a quick introduction. Please could you tell me and the rest of the group your...**
 - *Name?*
 - *What subject are you studying?*
 - *Which part of the UK you're studying in?*
 - *What does your average day at university look like?*

3. HOUSING CONDITIONS (5 minutes)

Objective: To gain an understanding of housing conditions and acceptability

I'd like to really get started with some questions on your experiences of your current accommodation...

- **Can you briefly describe what's good about your current accommodation?**
 - What do you enjoy about living there?
 - What's good about the actual house/flat rather than the people living in with you?
- **And can you also describe what's bad about your current accommodation?**
 - What particular issues have you had with your current accommodation?
 - Do you avoid being at home?
 - Do you avoid inviting friends and family over?
 - Do you think of it as your home?
 - What issues have you experienced with the temperature of your home – has it been too cold while you've lived there?
- **Thinking back to before you started university, how does your current accommodation compare to how you thought about how most students lived while they study?**
 - What is different to your expectations?
 - Is it better or worse than you expected?

4. ENERGY AND COSTS (10 minutes)

Objective: To understand experiences of paying energy bills and methods for coping with high costs

We'll come back to some further questions about your accommodation later in the group, but first I'd like to find out a bit more about your experiences of your heating system and your energy bills. When I'm talking about energy bills, I'm referring specifically to electricity and gas bills.

- **How do you pay for your energy bills?**
 - Who pays the bills? Is it you as tenants, or is it covered in your rent?
 - If your energy bills are included in your rent, please tell me more about how this works.
 - How do you know if you are using all the energy you are paying for?
 - What happens if you use more energy than is covered by your monthly payment?
 - How does this affect how you use energy in your accommodation?
- **Do you have a smart energy thermostat, such as Hive or Nest, in your house or flat?**
 - If you do, who controls this system?
 - If you do, can you tell me about your experiences of having this system in your accommodation?
 - If you don't, can you tell me about your experience of how it is controlled? And any impacts it has had on you?
- **Do you have a smart meter in your house or flat? A smart meter is a display that links to your meters to show you how much energy is being used in real-time.**
 - If you do, can you tell me about your experiences of having this system in your accommodation?

I'd like to talk a bit more about the cost of energy now...

- **How are you coping with paying energy bills?**
 - How difficult is it to pay for your energy (electricity and gas) bills?
 - Is paying your energy bills something you worry about?
 - Have you been unable to pay any bills you have received so far?
 - Was this something you and the people you lived with all experienced?
 - What changes have you made to your lifestyle so that you can pay your bills?
- **What did you do to meet your energy bill payments?**
 - Where did you go for advice on what to do?
 - How useful was the advice you received?
 - Have you looked in to changing your energy supplier or tariff?
 - What has stopped you doing this?

- **What effect has your experiences linked to paying you energy bills had on you?**
 - How has it affected your relationships with the people you live with?
 - How has it affected your relationships with your family?
 - How has it affected your academic work?
 - How else has it affected your day to day life?
 - What, if anything, have you cut back on to pay your energy bills?
- **Do you think other students have experienced the same issues as you?**

5. EXPERIENCES OF TEMPERATURE / COLD (15 minutes)

Objective: To understand actions taken to deal with living in a cold home

For this section, I'd like to find out a bit more about your experiences of heating your home this winter...

- **How would you describe the temperature of your home in general this winter?**
 - Is it warmer or colder than you would like?
 - How does this compare to other places you have rented while you've been a student?
- **How do you use your heating system to stay warm?**
 - How long do you have the heating on for?
 - How do you decide when to turn the heating on and off?
 - Do you heat all parts of your house / flat?
- **Have you experienced any problems with your heating system?**
- **How confident do you feel about adjusting the heating system?**
- **What else, if anything, do you do to keep warm at home?**
 - Worn more than one layer of clothes to bed
 - Worn outdoor wear (e.g. hat/scarf/coat/gloves) in your home
 - Chosen to go out to socialise rather than stay at home
 - Stayed longer in university / college buildings (library, class rooms/lecture theatres)
 - Stayed elsewhere (e.g. with parents, relatives, partner, friends)
 - Kept curtains closed all day to keep warmth in
 - Put plastic sheeting on the inside of windows
 - Used draught excluders
- **Do other people you live with do the same?**
- **Do you do anything different if people come over to your house/flat?**
 - Can you tell me why you do this when people come over?

- **Have you approached your landlord to improve anything to help you stay warm in your house / flat?**
 - What action did your landlord take?
 - How receptive were they to your requests?
 - If not, why didn't you ask your landlord to make improvements?

Next, I'd like you to take a look at some options related to the decisions you make in every day life. I'm going to present you with a pair of options, and I'd like to know how much more important one is than the other to you. Each question is different so please read carefully. Once you've decided, please use the tick icon on the right hand side to mark your choice.

We'll have a practice first. Can everyone see this image on the whiteboard? Please put a tick to indicate how important either option is to you.

6. IMPACTS OF COLD HOMES / HEALTH AND WELLBEING (15 minutes)

Now I'd like to ask a few questions about how living in a cold home has affected you...

- **Do you think that where you live has had an impact on your health?**
 - How has your health been affected?
 - Is this an existing issue that you think has been made worse by where you live?
 - What other problems has having poor health caused?
- **How else have you been affected by living in a cold home?**
 - How has it affected your mental health?
 - How has it affected your relationships with the people you live with?
 - How has it affected your academic work?

7. FUTURE ACCOMMODATION (15 minutes)

Objective: To gain an understanding of their learning from living in a cold home and ideas for how students' unions can support students living in the private rented sector

And now, thinking ahead to where you'll be living next...

- **What are the main things you'll be looking for in your next accommodation?**
 - Are there particular places you'll look to find your accommodation?
 - What about accreditation schemes?

- **Would you look for anything different related to energy?**
 - What about energy performance certificates (EPC)?
 - Do you know what an EPC is?
 - What about energy suppliers?
 - What about technologies like Hive/Nest or smart meters?
- **What if anything do you think your students' union do to support students who are experiencing living in cold homes and some of the related issues we've been talking about today?**
- **Do you think there's anything NUS could be doing?**

That's all my questions so thank you for taking the time to participate today, your thoughts and opinions are extremely helpful to us.

Just to reassure you that all your responses are completely confidential. We might use quotes of things you have said in reports, but you won't be personally identifiable.

Does anyone have any questions, or any final comments on the things we've discussed today?

Thanks again for your time.

