

# Could universities do more to end homelessness?

**Greg Hurst**

**With a Foreword from  
Professor Mary Stuart**



**Debate Paper 30**

## **About the author**

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## **Cover images**

The cover images are of young people experiencing homelessness in spring 2022 and living in hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation in Leicester, Malton in North Yorkshire and Merthyr Tydfil.

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## **Foreword**

### **Professor Mary Stuart**

In the summer of 1982, at the age of 25, I was pregnant with my twins and I was homeless. My partner and I had been evicted from our bedsit in north London. At the time, I was 'lucky enough' to be in hospital, as I had developed high blood pressure and they wanted to monitor my and the twins' progress. For my partner, the situation was awful. Days spent at the council offices trying to find us somewhere to live, nights full of worry. When I did come out of hospital with two (thank goodness) healthy babies, he had managed to find us a room in a hostel for homeless families.

Six weeks on and further daily visits sat in council offices, we were offered – and gratefully accepted – a council house. Standing over our children's cot (at that stage they topped and tailed in one cot, donated by a friend), we discussed what we could do and decided getting an education was the best way for us to move from being vulnerable in society, to contributing to society, and that is what we did. I studied with the Open University and my partner went to the local Poly. Both of us fell in love with our disciplines and that began a couple of fairly successful academic careers.

I tell this personal story because I believe it is important for us to talk about homelessness in our society and it is important to recognise that there are things that universities could do to join up with other civic organisations to try to address the long-term, but sadly growing, problem of homelessness. It is, I believe from my own experience, important to recognise that universities can provide some parts of the solution for some homeless people. Homelessness is complex and has many causes, but it is a problem that is often experienced by young

people, sometimes university students, as the author of this HEPI report, Greg Hurst, suggests.

There are some interesting initiatives which universities are involved in to tackle homelessness, some mentioned in the pages that follow, although the author is generally quite critical of universities' engagement with the question. There is some effective work that universities already do tackling homelessness but the value of this piece is that it contributes to an emerging debate about students and housing which most universities would recognise is an area of concern.

Homelessness sits at one end of a spectrum of housing issues and universities should explore their own position, not only in providing research on the issue or ensuring that relevant degree programmes teach their students about homelessness, but also by understanding the situation of their own student population. During my time as Vice-Chancellor at the University of Lincoln, we became aware through the work of our student services that 'sofa surfing' was a fact of life for some of our more vulnerable students and that we needed to engage with these challenges as well as other issues that they experienced as part of the support we provided.

Tackling homelessness with other local civic organisations should also be seen as part of a university's civic mission. As a lecturer at the University of Sussex in the 1990s, my Centre was actively involved in working with First Base in Brighton, a day centre for homeless people and more recently, in 2020, I was pleased to support the work being led by the University of Chichester, funded by the UPP Foundation, to work with homeless people to study towards a university degree as I and my partner did all those years ago.

Universities cannot be a panacea for all of society's ills but, as places of learning which have a social mission, working with

others on challenges such as homelessness is, I feel, part of any university's mission. It is great to see some universities responding to this challenge and I welcome this piece published by HEPI as it opens up a debate very necessary for the sector.

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## Executive summary

What has homelessness got to do with universities? The responses of many people to this question may range from a puzzled shrug to an emphatic ‘nothing’. Is ending homelessness not the responsibility of the state, some will ask?

It is. And yet, there is a powerful case to be made that the goal of ending homelessness could and should engage universities on several levels.

The prevalence of homelessness appears to be consistently higher in university towns and cities, in some cases strikingly so.

Applications to local authorities for homelessness assistance per head are significantly higher in university towns and cities in England compared with areas without a university (1,428 per 100,000, compared with 1,007). Rates of households living in temporary accommodation are more than twice as high (475 per 100,000, compared with 218). The prevalence of rough sleeping is more than three times greater (13 per 100,000, compared with 5). Similar patterns are found in Scotland and, to some degree, in Wales.

A comparative analysis between homelessness in towns and cities with universities – and homelessness in large towns without a university – by the Centre for Homelessness Impact in 2022 shows the same picture. This looks at homelessness trends in seven local authorities that have universities with traditional residential study models: Brighton and Hove, Cambridge, Kingston upon Thames, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford and Reading. These trends are compared with the pattern in seven of the largest towns in England without a university: Mansfield, Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Wakefield, Warrington, Wigan and Wirral. In the university towns and cities there are consistently higher absolute numbers and rates

of applications for homelessness assistance, rough sleeping and households in temporary accommodation.

Homelessness should engage the fundamental objects of a university, as set out in its founding charter. These objects will invariably refer to the twin core endeavours of research and education.

Research evidence into the effectiveness of interventions to relieve and prevent homelessness is weak, particularly in the United Kingdom. Too few academics are engaged in research on homelessness. Too few research institutes within universities specialise in homelessness, notwithstanding the excellent work of the small number that do so. When research is conducted in the UK on homelessness, it tends to be qualitative in nature rather than quantitative. Of 562 causal studies published in the English language across the world into the impact of homelessness interventions, 56 were of interventions in the UK. Just five recent UK randomised controlled trials in homelessness were conducted here.

We need not just more research on homelessness but a greater variety, with more randomised controlled trials and other quantitative evaluations in addition to rigorous qualitative studies. And we need researchers from a greater variety of disciplines to bring their differing methodologies and insights into this often over-looked field.

Teaching at universities also engages directly with the goal of ending homelessness. Of all areas of public policy, homelessness faces possibly more misconceptions and false narratives than almost any other. Tropes such as 'we are all two pay cheques away from homelessness' are not just false but significant obstacles to mobilising and maintaining support for targeted, evidence-led approaches to end homelessness. Statistical modelling has indicated that predicted risks of

experiencing homelessness by the age of 30 are 0.6 per cent for a single childless white man from an advantaged background but 71.2 per cent for a woman of mixed race who experienced poverty in childhood and who has children.

It is important that universities teach their students about homelessness, especially in courses whose graduates are likely to engage with homelessness in a professional capacity such as Medicine, Education, Social Work and many others. Curriculum content should be accurate, reflect the current evidence base, and be candid about what we do not yet know. The language and images used when teaching about homelessness should be calibrated with care to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and dehumanising individuals impacted by homelessness.

There is a broader argument, however, beyond saying simply that universities ought to deal with homelessness in the delivery of their founding objects. A strong case exists for suggesting that universities have a civic duty above and beyond their core objectives to relieve and prevent homelessness in the places in which they are anchored through their roles as dominant players in their communities and local economies.

The presence of a university within a community tends to make local housing costs more expensive, which is a contributory although not a prime cause of homelessness.

As often major actors in the economies of their communities, universities have an opportunity – a duty, even – to use their power for place-based initiatives to support people impacted by or at risk of homelessness. Perhaps the single most important example is in their role as employers: universities in the UK employ more than 400,000 staff. There is wide scope to review recruitment practices and conditions of employment to ensure that these can support rather than exclude people with experience of homelessness, and indeed for small-scale

trials and evaluations of models of supported employment. Similarly, universities can use their role as landowners or property managers to increase the supply of housing to tenants with a history or at risk of homelessness and, again, can test and evaluate experimental approaches to supported tenancies or housing.

In addition to civic duty, universities should engage with homelessness through their unique relationship with their student bodies. Students are less, not more, likely than people of their age in the general population to experience homelessness, which is closely associated with poverty and adversity in childhood. UK students should also have access to maintenance loans and other support. Nevertheless, with 2.7 million students in the United Kingdom, a drop-out rate of 5.3 per cent and a continued policy focus to widen participation by bringing more people from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education, many universities could and should ask themselves if they are doing enough to prevent homelessness among their current and recent students. They could start by collecting data on the housing stability of their students. Rates and instances of homelessness among students in the UK should be the subject of further robust research.

## Introduction

First, some definitions. What would it mean to end homelessness? Would this be achieved only if no single person in the United Kingdom experienced homelessness ever, of any kind or duration?

Clearly this is unrealistic. A better definition is this: that an effective end to homelessness will be achieved if it is prevented wherever possible; and, where it cannot be prevented, episodes of homelessness are rare, brief and non-recurring.

Prevention is key: people must be supported before they fall through the net of services and welfare systems that should protect them.

Public services and the welfare system ought to be so well designed and implemented that very few people do fall through the cracks to experience homelessness, which is the most extreme form of social exclusion. When people do so, systems should be sufficiently responsive that each episode of homelessness is as short as possible. And, once an individual, couple or family has received support from homelessness services, these should be bespoke and responsive to ensure that they do not do so again.

Next, the definition of homelessness itself. It is very common for people to associate homelessness with rough sleeping, the most visible and dangerous form of homelessness. And yet, rough sleeping is one small subset of a much bigger phenomenon.

Homelessness takes many forms: people sleeping in shelters, in hostels, in bed and breakfast accommodation, flats or houses used by local authorities as temporary accommodation for families with no place to call home, in cars or on the sofas of friends or family members.

To give a sense of scale, the most recent snapshot count of people sleeping rough on a single night in the autumn of 2021 in England recorded 2,440 people sleeping out, down from a peak of 4,751 in 2017.<sup>1</sup> Around the same time, there were 96,060 households living in temporary accommodation in England.<sup>2</sup> This figure is of households, not individuals, and doubled between 2012 and 2022. These households included 121,680 dependent children.

The total number of people experiencing homelessness across the United Kingdom at any one time is hard to quantify as sub-populations such as people 'sofa surfing' tend not to register on official data. But estimates by Heriot-Watt University for the homelessness charity Crisis put the total estimate of 'core' homelessness at around 200,000 people in England in 2020.<sup>3</sup> The figure for Scotland was 14,250.<sup>4</sup> For Wales it was 8,980.<sup>5</sup> Core homelessness includes people sleeping on the streets, in hostels, refuges, unsuitable temporary or unsuitable accommodation, squatting or 'sofa surfing' but not wider forms of homelessness. It is important to emphasise that these are not static figures. Many people exit homelessness themselves, while many others are supported into accommodation by local authority or homelessness charity services. All the while, new people slip into homelessness.

As for defining the term 'university', for the purpose of this paper this is used as a proxy for any institution providing higher education. As of summer 2022, there were 412 providers of higher education in England registered with the Office for Students, compared with just 140 institutions in membership of Universities UK, the membership organisation, from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Universities lie at the core of this argument because of their mission, scale and common residential model but it also applies to tertiary education providers of many different kinds,

from conservatoires to colleges of further education offering foundation degrees or degree apprenticeships.

Lastly, a note about language. Homelessness is not an inevitable feature of society, and it can and should be prevented. Further, homelessness when it does occur should be a temporary experience and should not define an individual in the life they go on to lead. For these reasons, it is appropriate to use person-centred language: to talk about individuals and not the transitional state of homelessness they may encounter. This means, for example, talking about a person experiencing homelessness and not about a 'homeless person'; it means talking about the phenomenon of rough sleeping but not about 'rough sleepers'.





# 1. The objects of a university

*The research base on homelessness is weak*

Let us turn first to the objects of a university. Read through the founding charter of any university, large or small, old or young, and under its 'objects' you will find these are for the public benefit by prosecuting original research and by advancing education and learning. These core activities of research and teaching both have a vital role to play in ending homelessness.

High-quality original research is key because our fundamental challenge is this: while the causes of homelessness are well understood, we lack a robust evidence base for what works to relieve and prevent homelessness.

There are some brilliant academics and specialist centres in UK universities that are beacons of excellence in helping to understand the most effective ways to relieve and prevent homelessness.

Foremost among them is Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Director of the Institute for Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research at Heriot-Watt University, one of the world's experts in homelessness. Her colleagues Professor Sarah Johnsen, Dr Beth Watts and Professor Glen Bramley are also experts in this field.

Another is Dr Peter Mackie, Reader in the School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University, a leading researcher in data analysis and evaluation trials. A third is Dr Kesia Reeve, Principal Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University, whose interest and expertise is in women and homelessness.

One example of new research is a trial developed by the Centre for Homelessness Impact with the team at King's College London for the UK's first randomised controlled trial into direct cash transfers to people experiencing street homelessness.

Cash transfers, or giving money directly to people experiencing hardship, have a strong evidence base drawing on evaluations across the world as an effective route out of poverty. They give people flexibility to make their own choices about how best to improve their lives, studies have shown.

There is widespread stereotyping of people facing adversity: there are commonly-held assumptions that recipients of cash sums would 'waste' an unplanned allocation of money, by spending it on alcohol, on illegal drugs, on gambling or on low-impact status goods. But the evidence suggests otherwise. In particular, it suggests that a larger lump sum of money has a greater transformative effect and long-term impact than a series of small cash payments.

For example, profits from a casino built on land held by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in the 1990s were shared with the community. Around 16,000 people received payments of \$2,000 (£1,200) or \$3,000 (£1,800) twice a year. Researchers who evaluated the impact found their children did better at school, that their physical and mental health improved and rates of crime and domestic violence fell.<sup>6</sup>

Not many programmes have tested the impact of giving personal grants to people experiencing homelessness. But a research trial in Vancouver, Canada in 2018 gave payments to people who had experienced homelessness for an average of six months and compared their progress over a year to others in similar circumstances who were not given money.<sup>7</sup>

The 50 individuals who received cash transfers moved faster into stable housing, spent more money on food, clothes and rent, spent fewer days homeless, and many kept some of the money as savings.

So, a group of like-minded organisations and individuals is testing if similar results can be achieved here. This programme

will ask 180 people with a recent history of street homelessness to take part in four UK cities: Manchester, Oxford, Glasgow and Swansea. Half of the participants, chosen by a lottery, will be given a personal fund of £2,000 as a single lump sum. The others will continue to receive the support they have previously but will not get a payment. This ground-breaking randomised controlled trial should help us to understand the difference that money makes, or whether it does not, to relieve rough sleeping.

As evaluation partners, researchers at The Policy Institute at King's College London will screen nominated participants and, once the transfers are made, will ask them in periodic surveys about their circumstances over the following year to evaluate what impact, if any, the personal funds have had. Progress to recruit participants have been tough: breaking new ground is not easy.

One of the fascinating things about homelessness as a topic for research is the range of academic disciplines and approaches it can engage. These go well beyond Human Geography and Demographic Economics and into other branches of social science, and well beyond.

Homelessness is central to Social Policy, and it should be considered within Sociology and Political Science. It is relevant to Health Inequality, Psychology and Political and Moral Philosophy. Evaluating the relative effectiveness of homelessness services or intervention models can involve research approaches, including Quantitative Analysis, Ethnography, Behavioural Science, Epidemiology and many others. One current research project uses high-volume data scraping of pejorative words and phrases to understand the role of language in reinforcing stigma associated with homelessness.

And yet, despite some stand-out examples of high-quality research in this field, current activity is not enough. We are still in the foothills of fully exploring what works to end homelessness: the peaks of this mountain range loom up well beyond us.

Moreover, the UK studies we do have on homelessness tend to be qualitative and conceptual, showing a preoccupation with theory. The United States has both a far greater volume of homelessness research and a tradition of quantitative evaluation that can answer more scientifically specific questions about what works.

There have been 562 quantitative evaluation studies published across the world in the English language on the effectiveness of interventions to end homelessness, a high proportion of which have been published since 2020. Just 56 refer to interventions in the UK and, of these, 33 are primary studies and 23 systematic reviews. Just five randomised controlled trials of homelessness interventions have been conducted in the UK since 2016. In comparison 405 evaluation studies into the effectiveness of homelessness interventions are from the US and 99 were conducted in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

Salutary as international studies are, their results may not be replicated in UK nations where, for instance, the benefits system, universal free healthcare and a legal duty on local authorities to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness provide a different context. To expand our own evidence base, this means bespoke trials should be conducted here.

Of course, rigorous qualitative research on homelessness has value, too. The emphasis on quantitative evaluations in US studies means these can answer very narrow questions very thoroughly without always being anchored in 'big picture' analysis. Conceptual, empirical, policy and legal

analysis work, international and comparative studies, or 'fundamental' research, are also critical to identify both causes of homelessness and potential solutions for evaluation. Qualitative research has, however, too often become the default approach in homelessness research within the UK that, over time, has led to a lack of capacity for alternative approaches.

This is not the fault of any academic, faculty or university; it is a strategic weakness that funding councils and foundations were slow to recognise and address over several decades.

Researchers within UK universities have a crucial role in raising the status of studies into what works, and what does not work, to relieve and prevent homelessness, and what works for specific groups of people and in what circumstances. We should bring new disciplines and approaches into this field. And we need a cultural change so that testing what works to end homelessness is as well entrenched as testing what works is in, say, Medicine. This means balancing robust qualitative research with more randomised controlled trials, systematic reviews, meta analyses and other quantitative methods of generating and synthesising evidence.

### *Evidence-led teaching on homelessness*

The other dimension to a university's objectives, that of teaching, also has a core role in ending homelessness. It matters that homelessness should be included in curriculum content and that teaching that discusses homelessness does so in an evidence-led way. Homelessness seems to generate more misconceptions and false narratives than almost any other area of social policy.

The saying that all of us are two pay cheques away from homelessness? Not true. Homelessness in young adulthood is closely associated with poverty, especially poverty in

childhood. Other higher risk factors are health needs, serious drug use, lack of social support networks and living in a high-cost housing area. But none of these is as significant as poverty.

To disprove the ‘two pay cheques from homelessness’ myth, Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Glen Bramley, in a paper published in the journal *Housing Studies*, analysed three UK surveys that asked participants about past experiences of homelessness.<sup>9</sup>

They used these to compare the probability of homelessness by the age of 30 of two single adults with different backgrounds. A white man who sailed untroubled through school and university and lived with his parents at 26 had a likelihood of homelessness of just 0.6 per cent. A woman of mixed ethnicity who was brought up by a lone parent and experienced poverty as a child, left school at 16 and had spells of unemployment, rented a home at 26 and had children, had a probability of homelessness of 71.2 per cent.

*Table 1: Comparative probability of experiencing homelessness*

White man	Woman of mixed ethnicity
Relatively affluent upbringing in rural south England	From lone parent family, experienced poverty in childhood
No problems at school, graduated from university aged 21	Left school at 16, spells of unemployment
Living with parents at age 26	Renting property at age 26
No partner	No partner
No children	Has children
Predicted homelessness by 30	Predicted homelessness by 30
<b>0.6%</b>	<b>71.2%</b>

Source: Glen Bramley & Suzanne Fitzpatrick, ‘Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?’, *Housing Studies*, 2018

As you see, homelessness does not affect us all equally.

An annual opinion poll conducted by Ipsos tracks and explores public perceptions of homelessness.<sup>10</sup> One question asks participants to estimate the proportion of people affected by homelessness who have a drug or alcohol dependency. The average estimate among 2,000 people polled in 2021 was that half (49 per cent) do so. In fact, data collected by local authorities in England on people assessed as at risk of homelessness tells us that just 5 per cent of households in this situation have an alcohol dependency and 7 per cent are dependent on drugs.<sup>11</sup> The figures for Scotland are 11 and 10 per cent respectively.<sup>12</sup> Public perceptions are hugely skewed by the prototype of street homelessness, affecting small numbers of predominantly older men, and overlook larger numbers of women with children affected by homelessness.

The inclusion of curriculum content on homelessness is especially important in vocational courses, whose graduates can be expected to interact with homelessness in a professional capacity. Medicine, Housing Studies, Social Work, Law, Social Policy, Theology, Sociology, Education, Psychology, Dentistry, Nursing, Pharmacy, Criminology, Building and Architecture all fall into this category. Given the intersectionality of a deep-seated social issue like homelessness, the problem-based approach to teaching and learning used in vocational courses such as those in healthcare is also much more suitable than the theory-based pedagogy of many other disciplines.

Relatively few UK universities teach about homelessness within degree courses – although a minority do – usually as a small part of an undergraduate or postgraduate course. For instance:

- Cardiff Metropolitan University has a module on homelessness in its Housing Studies degree;

- the University of Stirling has a unit on housing and homelessness within its Sociology and Social Policy degree; and
- the University of Kent offers an optional module on technical law relating to homelessness for students studying Law.

It is critical that references to homelessness within university teaching are rigorously tested and evidence based. We should be candid about what we do not know. The weakness of the evidence base means that many interventions to support people impacted by homelessness, including many used by local authority teams to discharge their statutory duties to prevent and relieve homelessness, have not been subjected to evaluations using scientific methods. We do not know if they work, or indeed if they cause harm. Curriculum materials would also benefit from consultation with and feedback from people with personal experience of homelessness.

Stand-out examples where universities do this well include a module on homelessness and inclusion health offered by the Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care at University College London. This has a strong focus on practice and was developed in partnership with Pathway, a homelessness healthcare charity, and includes guest lecturers who are clinicians and people with personal experience of homelessness. It is offered as an option with a Master of Science degree on Population Health and as a seven-week course for healthcare professionals.<sup>13</sup> The University of Edinburgh has also developed an online postgraduate course on homelessness and health inclusion, which is interdisciplinary and offered to students of Medicine, Nursing, Social Sciences, Allied Health and Geography.<sup>14</sup> Its assessments include presentations by students to their peers, practitioners and people impacted by homelessness themselves.



Another aspect of teaching is important, too. Many of the misconceptions about homelessness stem from stereotyping. How we portray homelessness can subconsciously reinforce such stereotypes or help to challenge them. Neutral or person-first language can avoid dehumanising individuals who are experiencing homelessness or avoid implying a permanent, defining identity to what ought to be a temporary state. Good practice would be to co-produce teaching materials with people with personal experience of homelessness, or at the very least to conduct some user testing or sense-checking of curriculum content with experts by experience, for example via a local homelessness charity or service. If individuals who have been impacted by homelessness are engaged in such work, it is good practice to pay a fee for their expertise and in cash (if they wish) rather than in vouchers that presuppose how they should spend their money.

Images, too, can stigmatise individuals. Photographs used on web pages, slides and in other teaching materials should be chosen with care. The default image used to portray homelessness is invariably of a man in a sleeping bag in a shop doorway or a tent on an urban street. Is this appropriate or even accurate while the issue at hand may be families in temporary accommodation, a young person sleeping on a friend's sofa or a woman in a refuge having fled domestic abuse?



## 2. Universities as civic actors

### *Higher homelessness in university towns and cities*

There is, however, a broader argument beyond the objectives of a university and how these can relate to ending homelessness. As civic actors in their communities, universities have a moral imperative to address homelessness in a place-based way where they operate.

Data suggests that higher rates of homelessness appear to be a common feature of many university towns and cities. This is not to suggest any direct link between student populations and homelessness. Rather, the presence of a university or universities in a city or large town exerts significant upward pressure on local housing costs as demand for housing from undergraduates, postgraduates and early career academics squeezes the supply of lower cost flats and houses. Indeed, the phenomenon of wealthy parents buying a property for their child to live in while studying at university, and subsequently renting it out for income, adds further to this pressure.

Let us look, for instance, at 66 local authorities in England that are home to one or more universities and compare their rates of homelessness per 100,000 of their populations with those across councils with no universities:

- rates of households living in temporary accommodation are more than double in university towns and cities (475 per 100,000, compared with 218);
- rates of rough sleeping are three times greater (12 per 100,000, compared with 5); and
- applications to local authorities for homelessness assistance are also significantly higher (1,428 per 100,000, compared with 1,007).

Rates of homelessness are similarly higher on all three measures in seven Scottish local authorities with universities in comparison with other councils in Scotland. There is no point-in-time count of rough sleeping in Scotland, where data is collated from questions when people seek homelessness assistance and relates to a three-month period, so its figures are not comparable to other countries.

Wales follows the pattern to a lesser degree. Rough sleeping is more prevalent in absolute terms and per head in six unitary authorities that are home to Welsh universities. The number of approaches for homelessness assistance is almost twice as high, although the rate per 100,000 of the population is slightly greater in non-university areas. The reverse is the case with households in temporary accommodation: the absolute number is bigger in university areas, but the rate is higher in non-university authorities.

This pattern broadly holds if we look solely at smaller cities and towns in England where the presence of a university makes it a dominant economic entity, rather than one of several large employers. In university towns and cities with a maximum population of 250,000, rates of homelessness applications to local authorities are again higher and street homelessness much higher in comparison to all other councils.

Rates of temporary accommodation are, however, significantly lower: this reflects the particularly high numbers of families placed in temporary accommodation in large cities: the London boroughs, Manchester and Birmingham. Clearly, though, homelessness is not only or even predominantly an inner-city problem.

*Table 2: Comparative homelessness in universities towns and cities (TA = temporary accommodation)*

<b>England</b>	Average number of applications	Average number of approaches per 100k	Average rough sleeping number	Average rough sleeping per 100k	Average households in TA number	Average households in TA per 100k
Other authorities	730	1,007	8	5	189	218
University towns	1,662	1,428	21	12	621	475

### **Scotland**

Other authorities	736	1,239	28	21	251	440
University towns	2,198	1,485	108	32	973	602

### **Wales**

Other authorities	1,056	2,031	5	3	159	311
University towns	1,856	1,885	15	7	184	208

Source: National and local authority homelessness data are collated in the Centre for Homelessness Impact's SHARE platform. Figures as at summer 2022<sup>15</sup>

*Table 3: Homelessness university towns with a population up to 250,000*

	Average number of applications	Average number of approaches per 100k	Average rough sleeping number	Average rough sleeping per 100k	Average household in TA number	Average household in TA per 100k
Other authorities	917	1,068	10	5	287	276
University towns	964	1,271	21	18	152	196

Such comparisons are inevitably crude. Nor can they reflect differences between types of university, particularly the predominantly residential model of more traditional pre-1992 universities and the travel-to-study models in some modern universities.

We can look in greater detail at patterns of homelessness in proximity to largely residential universities using classifications developed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to categorise census data in local areas. It divides communities in England and Wales into 15 groups with similar statistical features, one of which is university towns and cities.<sup>16</sup> There are seven of these: Brighton and Hove (population 272,952); Cambridge (122,725); Kingston upon Thames (160,436); Manchester (502,902); Nottingham (303,899); Oxford (150,245); and Reading (155,339).

We can then compare their rates of homelessness with those in seven of the largest towns in England without a university that have a broadly similar spread of populations: Mansfield (population 104,466); Milton Keynes (248,800); Peterborough

(183,631); Wakefield (325,837); Warrington (202,228); Wigan (317,849); and Wirral (319,783). Milton Keynes is, of course, home to the Open University but has no mainstream student campus.

Again, we find consistently higher absolute numbers and rates of applications for homelessness assistance, rough sleeping and households in temporary accommodation in university communities.

*Table 4: Homelessness in ONS university towns and cities*

	Number of total applications	Rate of applications per 100k	Number of people rough sleeping	Rate of people rough sleeping per 100k	Number of households in TA	Number of households in TA per 100k
Brighton and Hove	n/a	n/a	37	12	n/a	n/a
Cambridge	698	1,593	14	11	106	242
Kingston upon Thames	449	650	28	15	n/a	n/a
Manchester	5,836	2,684	43	7	2,705	1,244
Nottingham	2,847	2,185	23	6	474	363
Oxford	579	1,089	24	15	100	188
Reading	1,404	2,146	22	13	172	262
<b>Average</b>	<b>1,969</b>	<b>1,725</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>460</b>

Table 5: Homelessness in large towns without a university

	Number of total applications	Number of total applications per 100k	Number of people rough sleeping	Rate of people rough sleeping per 100k	Number of households in TA	Number of households in TA per 100k
Mansfield	193	403	10	9	14	29
Milton Keynes	1,964	1,828	18	7	989	920
Peterborough	1,013	1,256	36	17	300	372
Wakefield	1,773	1,153	5	1	279	182
Warrington	2,070	2,254	10	5	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Wigan	2,140	1,468	5	2	123	84
Wirral	1,149	791	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	39	27
<b>Average</b>	<b>1,472</b>	<b>1,308</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>269</b>

We cannot say definitely why this is all so, but features identified by the ONS as common to university towns and cities include a younger population (median age 32 years) and residents who are more likely to live in flats and to rent rather than own their accommodation. A larger rental market is, therefore, a key dynamic. This analysis should not be seen as definitive but as a prompt for further, more detailed, study of homelessness trends in university towns and cities.

### *Community engagement*

Universities are, therefore, significant actors in their communities whether they choose consciously to be so or not. University councils, vice-chancellors, leadership teams, academic and non-academic staff and students could consider how they can use their reach and convening power in the communities within which they are based to address



homelessness, and the trauma and damage to individuals this entails.

This convening power can be, and often is, deployed through extracurricular activity by students and staff to engage with nearby homelessness services and community organisations, or even run initiatives themselves.

The evidence here suggests sensitivity is required in calibrating voluntary action by students or university staff that achieves real impact and can operate at scale. One study has suggested that voluntary initiatives that ameliorate the material deprivation of people experiencing homelessness, especially rough sleeping, may do little lasting good and even harm. This looked at a charity in Australia that offered a free mobile washing facility for people without shelter, using washing machines and clothes driers in retro fitted vans.<sup>17</sup> The authors argued that, despite widespread media attention, endorsement by celebrities and copycat social enterprises, its effect appeared at best marginal and may even have been negative by sustaining street homelessness and drawing donations and attention away from established services of proven effectiveness.

Put bluntly, ladling out soup, handing out socks, winter coats or blankets, offering showers or haircuts and even fundraising sleep-outs, may not in themselves do lasting good and each requires empirical evaluation. Fundraising activity will always serve a role. Volunteering by students and university staff might, however, be much better deployed in activities to prevent homelessness, such as by offering advice on housing, access to benefits and employment and providing support networks to people at risk of homelessness. A good example is volunteering facilitated by many university Law schools, in partnership with the charity LawWorks, through which Law students offer free legal advice on homelessness assistance.

Engagement with individuals affected by homelessness and with community groups need not be limited to extracurricular activity. More thinking would be welcome within universities about how the experience and insights from such interaction could be used to enrich their students' studies.

Vocational degree courses that offer internships or placements to their students may also forge mutually beneficial partnerships with homelessness service providers. Birmingham City University, Coventry University and the University of Worcester, for example, arrange internships with St Basils, a homelessness charity for young people in the West Midlands, for students studying disciplines including Occupational Therapy, Social Work, Psychology and Criminology.

Since the trebling of university tuition fees in England in 2012, we have seen a big effort within higher education to build employability skills into course structures or as additional modules: presentations, projects, team-working, problem-solving. Some of these are subject to formal assessment and contribute to degree credits but many occur in artificial environments whose replication of real-world challenges is weak: typically, a seminar room with an audience of one or two academics and fellow students.

How much more beneficial would be the development of employability skills through interaction with, for example, individuals using a support service for people experiencing homelessness?

In early 2022, I attended a performance at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff where I was introduced to its Principal, Helena Gaunt. We discussed homelessness and her wish to engage with community organisations and for the conservatoire's students to have more opportunities to gain experience of performing in diverse settings.

I was able to make an introduction to Arts and Homelessness International, a network of arts and creativity projects for people experiencing homelessness. The College has now begun a conversation with a Welsh youth homelessness charity, Llamau, with a view to working with its arts programme team to involve its students in both performances and workshops, and a possible residency for students. How wonderful.

This approach could be applied in many disciplines beyond the performing arts. Sport is an obvious means of engagement and purposeful activity with individuals experiencing homelessness, particularly young people.

Universities are themselves communities, of course, and have opportunities to raise awareness of issues such as homelessness among their student bodies and graduate networks.

The University of Roehampton, for example, organised a Homelessness Awareness Week on its campus in south London in March 2022 for which it appointed a Poet in Residence, who was a spoken-word poet with experience of homelessness. The programme for the week included a seminar and roundtable discussion on the pedagogy of homelessness to explore how better to understand homelessness and consider ethnographic methods, ethics of research and experiential and social learning.

### *Universities as employers*

Universities are civic actors in their communities in other ways, too. One is in their role as an employer. Often a university will be among the largest employers in a large town or small city, sometimes the biggest. Others have considerable scale. The University of Edinburgh, for instance, employs 15,000 people; University College London, has more than 14,300 staff; the

University of Manchester has more than 12,000. Institutions within Universities UK employed 409,055 staff in 2019/20, almost half of them in non-academic posts.<sup>18</sup>

This presents many opportunities for strengthening the steps to prevent homelessness and to expand the weak evidence base of what we know about what works, thereby supporting people to exit homelessness through employment.

Data show us almost a quarter of people who qualified for homelessness assistance in England in 2020/21 were in work: 22 per cent, split evenly between full-time and part-time jobs.<sup>19</sup> Three years previously, the figure was even higher, at 29 per cent. Many more people impacted by homelessness want to work but do not or cannot.

In their role as employers, universities could reflect on what we know about common barriers that make it harder for people impacted by homelessness to gain and remain in employment and think about whether there are simple steps they could take to mitigate these. Among these barriers are poor health, lack of self-confidence, drug or alcohol problems, low educational attainment, few qualifications, a criminal record or limited opportunities for work experience.

It is not hard to adjust some recruitment practices to make these more inclusive, including to people with experience of homelessness: advertising some posts in *The Big Issue*; removing references to qualifications if these are not relevant to the role; asking for a short video as an alternative to a CV; and reflecting on whether criminal convictions are relevant to an application.

More exciting, and potentially more impactful, would be if some universities used their position as employers to expand the evidence base with small-scale trials into the effectiveness or otherwise of bespoke employment models.

Among those most worth testing and evaluating is Individual Placement and Support, which was developed in the United States for adults with severe mental illness but is so far untested in homelessness here. Its principles are to offer work to anyone who wants it, regardless of their apparent readiness for the labour market; to start them in a paid position rapidly, avoiding long delay; and to offer individualised support for as long as required alongside an offer of secure accommodation. Robust evaluations in this approach for people with mental illness have shown better outcomes than for more conventional 'train-and-place' services.<sup>20</sup>

### *Universities as landlords*

The other role of a university as a civic actor is through its ownership and management of estates and property. Universities in England and Wales alone own more than 52,000 hectares of land and property. This is heavily skewed by the wealth of some colleges of Cambridge and Oxford, who between them own 41,580 hectares or almost 80 per cent of university land, and by a small number of institutions with specialisms in Agriculture and Animal Science that have large holdings, such as the universities of Reading, Aberystwyth, Wales, Bangor and Harper Adams University.<sup>21</sup>

The small number of universities or their colleges that hold residential properties as investments should ensure that they act as a responsible landlord, offering secure and safe housing at affordable rates, including by letting to people in receipt of benefits, as the law requires, or with a recent history of homelessness. We know that such people often face stigma and can be screened out by landlords or letting agents without even being given a chance.

Properties can also be offered to organisations working to support people affected by homelessness. For example, Christ

Church in Oxford has among its assets a former Victorian primary school that it offers as a gift-in-kind to Aspire, an employment charity and social enterprise in the city that seeks to empower people facing homelessness, poverty and disadvantage, which it uses as offices and employment workshops. True, Christ Church is one of the Oxford's wealthiest colleges and so hardly typical, but the example stands.

Clearly universities have a duty to achieve a commercial return from their property estate in order to further their founding objectives. There may, however, be instances where universities have buildings which they own or lease that no longer suit their current needs and are allocated for future development. Such 'meanwhile' sites could be converted for short or medium-term use as accommodation for people impacted by homelessness, perhaps in partnership with a homelessness charity or housing association.

A similar approach could be used for plots of land allocated for development by a university but not yet utilised. Vacant land can be rapidly deployed to increase the supply of emergency or temporary accommodation for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness by hosting high-quality modular housing units, working with a local authority or housing provider. These compact, factory-built, self-contained homes can be winched into place within days once planning permission is granted and plumbing and utility services are in place. Not every site is suitable for modular housing units to be used as emergency housing: these should be in safe locations near amenities and transport links. They can, however, offer a way to increase rapidly the stock of social housing or temporary accommodation and enable individuals or, in some cases families, to access self-contained housing while they wait to be allocated a more permanent home.

For an illustration of why universities should have regard

to the supply of social and affordable housing within their communities we can look to St Andrews in Fife, where the issue has been a source of town versus gown tension.<sup>22</sup> The local authority introduced a moratorium on further houses in multiple occupation beyond the 871 already licensed, on the ground that most are let to students and inflate housing costs beyond the means of residents. Ironically, many of the private properties let to students are former council houses previously offered to lower income tenants at subsidised rents but sold off under the right to buy policy before this was ended in Scotland in 2016.





### **3. Universities and their student bodies**

#### *Unique relationship with students*

There is another line of argument in the case for universities engaging in efforts to end homelessness, which is the relationship they have with their student bodies.

This is a nuanced point given the particular hazard of false narratives when considering homelessness: the risk of homelessness is not something that we face equally. The correlation between poverty and homelessness tells us that students are less likely to face homelessness than the rest of the population, given that a large proportion of students are from better-off families.

Nonetheless, universities have been under pressure from governments over the past decade to widen their admissions and accept more applicants who are from low-income households or disadvantaged backgrounds. Doing so means broadening the composition of a university's student body and, therefore, admitting more people whose past experiences mean they face a higher risk of homelessness.

The appointment in late 2021 of John Blake as Director for Fair Access and Participation at the Office for Students has re-focused attention on school leavers' admission to, and achievement while at, universities in England.<sup>23</sup> Mr Blake, a former school teacher and assistant head teacher, who held senior posts in two academy chains, has declared 'you one get one shot at state-subsidised undergraduate education', reinforcing the impression that the regulator's attention is on the transition directly from school or college to higher education.<sup>24</sup>

It would be a retrograde step if widening access and enhancing achievement in higher education are seen solely through the lens of school leavers progressing directly to university. Mature

and part-time students have in the past been much more likely to enter higher education with diverse backgrounds and life experiences, whether this be in a college of further education or a more traditional university. We know there has been a collapse in numbers of part-time and mature students since the Coalition Government raised university tuition fees to £9,000 in England: part-time entrants fell by 50 per cent and enrolments to other undergraduate courses dropped by 74 per cent between 2008/09 and 2020/21.<sup>25</sup> This will undoubtedly have narrowed or closed off routes into higher education for people whose lives have been impacted by homelessness but who have talent and who want to learn.

When thinking about widening participation in higher education, admissions processes should not exclude potential applicants whose time at school has been disrupted by homelessness, such as by living in temporary accommodation in childhood or indeed in adult life. Access and Participation Plans drawn up by universities in England for the regulator should consider how they can recruit and support students who have been affected by homelessness and other adverse experiences both during their schooling and in adulthood.

Here the example of the University of Chichester's access course, *From Adversity to University*, illustrates how a bespoke and targeted initiative can overcome some barriers to higher education. Its 12-week bridging course, set up with support from the UPP Foundation, has no entry requirements, is delivered flexibly to fit around work or family commitments and focuses on developing personal as well as academic skills with the aim of preparing people to apply for a degree course. The course leaders have forged links with local homelessness charities and developed solutions to some of the practical challenges that can present themselves if people experiencing homelessness do enter higher education.

These include: working with local charities to develop a photo ID card to register students with no identity documents or proof of address; providing laptops and wi-fi access; helping full-time students apply for a hardship loan to bridge any gap between losing benefits and receiving a student loan; and supporting undergraduates who live in student accommodation during university vacations.

It is welcome that this university is conducting a longitudinal evaluation of the impact of this bridging course, although this is very small-scale and does not include a control group. It is particularly commendable that the academics behind the course have developed a toolkit summarising what they have learned from the project for other universities to follow and deploy.<sup>26</sup>

### *Preventing homelessness among students*

Having said that university students are at lower risk of homelessness than the rest of the population of similar age, we must remember that the student population in the UK is large and rising: to 2.7 million in 2020/21.<sup>27</sup> With an average drop-out rate of 5.3 per cent among UK undergraduates, who are the largest group, and with non-continuation rates running into double figures in some institutions and on some courses, it is also reasonable to ask whether universities do enough to prevent homelessness among their own students.<sup>28</sup>

We are unusual in the UK in having a well-developed tradition of residential study for a large proportion of university students. Many universities have, at key stages, a unique relationship with their students in acting as landlord, especially in their first year of undergraduate study when discontinuation rates are highest.

The picture will, of course, vary between older and newer

universities, and the increase in overall student numbers has been accompanied by a growth in Purpose-Built Student Accommodation run by private providers, although often universities will signpost students to these.

Nevertheless, it is striking how incurious UK universities and funding bodies have been, as individual institutions and as a higher education sector, in the phenomena of homelessness among students and former students. Very little high-quality research exists to quantify its scale, although a number of snap-shot surveys and individual testimonies indicate that student homelessness may be significantly under-reported. For example, Patrick Mulrenan, Associate Professor of Learning at London Metropolitan University, has suggested that student homelessness is significantly underestimated at post-1992 universities.<sup>29</sup>

There is a further case for researching whether such housing instability among certain groups of disadvantaged students was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Union of Students (NUS) conducted a large survey in 2020 which indicated that a substantial proportion of students who rely on part-time or sometimes full-time jobs to support themselves while studying had their hours reduced, or were required to take unpaid leave or were dismissed during the pandemic, leaving them less able to manage financially. The NUS further reported that half of students who took part in its survey said that someone who supported them financially, such as a parent, experienced a loss of income due to COVID lockdowns or other disruptions to employment, leaving students concerned about their own financial security.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps university leaders and administrators will argue that they cannot be held responsible for the housing stability of their students who, after all, will overwhelmingly be over the age of 18. Almost no one would suggest, however, that

universities should not be concerned for the welfare and wellbeing of their students in a broad sense. Student welfare teams are a long-established part of a fabric of support offered by universities.

I was Education Editor of *The Times* when the Coalition Government and the subsequent Conservative Government first relaxed and then abolished student number controls for UK and European Union undergraduates at English higher education institutions. We saw a rapid, indeed a dramatic, expansion in student numbers at many large, prestigious and popular universities and corresponding falls in recruitment at others. It was very apparent to me that in this demand-led system, in which every undergraduate represented tuition fee income of £9,000 a year, many universities expanded their student numbers at a much faster rate than they increased the capacity of their on-campus welfare and support services, and indeed their own accommodation stock. With more students from non-traditional backgrounds entering higher education, the reverse should have happened.

I subsequently reported on many distressing cases of suicide, severe mental illness and adverse experiences among university students, although we must bear in mind that rates of suicide among students are low and significantly lower than among people in the general population of similar age. A debate arose about the availability and quality of mental health services and support for students.

Initially, too many vice-chancellors were defensive, arguing they should not be reasonably held responsible, for example, for notifying parents of students who were experiencing distress and chronic or dangerous episodes of mental ill-health. But universities lost the argument, having failed to read a change in mood and expectations among both students and parents. Many changes followed including research, student

surveys and an opt-in process enabling students to consent to their university notifying their parents or another trusted person if serious concerns arise for their mental or physical health or wellbeing.

With this in mind, could universities do more to collect light-touch data on the housing status of their students, and even of former students, perhaps in partnership with their student unions? Some of this information may be held by universities on their student records management system; but how many would really know, and indeed follow up, if an undergraduate was evicted from or left private rented housing to sleep on a course mate's sofa? These institutions invest considerable resources into tracking the employment status of their graduates, in order to protect and enhance their performance in graduate earnings tables. Adding one simple question on housing stability to anonymised surveys of their current students would fill a gap in this data.

It may not be realistic to add such a question to the core 27 questions in the *National Student Survey* (NSS), which is already large and whose focus is academic experiences. Those universities and further education colleges with high discontinuation rates could, however, explore the addition of such a question to the NSS optional bank of questions. A cross-sector organisation such as Universities UK, the National Union of Students, the Office for Students or the Scottish Funding Council could also commission polling from a specialist market research organisation to collect snapshot national data on homelessness among students.

Individual universities could also usefully help preventative work by adding a similar question in welfare or other surveys that might identify students at risk of homelessness, and by doing so improve continuation rates if this enabled them to offer or broker some transitional help. They might engage

their alumni in such work. Some universities are very liberal in offering financial incentives to prospective students as inducements during their admissions process. It would be a much better, and more responsible, approach to direct financial support to current students who are unable to pay their rent or face other difficulties, particularly as the surge in inflation to beyond 9 per cent in mid-2022 will squeeze more students' capacity to pay higher food and energy costs.

During the long summer vacation, when most undergraduate students are obliged to leave halls of residence or private rented accommodation, a particular pinch-point occurs for students who are estranged from their families or for other reasons have nowhere to go. Their status as students and entitlement to student finance means that most cannot claim benefits unless they are a parent or have a disability. When UK university campuses closed in spring 2020, in response to the first COVID-19 lockdown, the size of this group became apparent when many universities found unexpected numbers of students who wanted to stay in halls of residence because they were unable to return home.

Continuing to identify these students is crucial. Many universities will have vacant rooms in halls of residence during the summer that they could offer or could give small, targeted packages of short-term financial support to tide these students over until the next academic year or signpost them to high-quality support if they are graduating. Universities that have relationships with private operators of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation might consider asking them to allocate a certain number of rooms for such use.





## 4. What is to be done?

There is, then, a case to be made that the challenge of ending homelessness can engage universities and providers of higher education in the pursuit of their objectives, in their roles as civic actors in their communities and in their relationships with their students.

Universities can be large and complex entities that operate on multiple levels, both academic and non-academic, without connecting such activity across their institutions. To accelerate an end to homelessness within the communities they serve, universities may also wish to consider a more strategic engagement with the cause of ending homelessness in their localities. For every university this may differ, depending on its location, mission, subject mix, student demographic and resources.

Providers of higher education are well positioned to support or facilitate place-based coalitions of organisations and individuals committed to ending homelessness. Key elements might be convening evidence-based volunteering at scale and running coordinated initiatives to offer employment to people impacted by homelessness or to create additional social housing capacity.

The unique role that universities can play, however, is to create opportunities to test and learn from new ways of seeking to relieve and prevent homelessness, especially if this is done in partnership with people directly impacted by homelessness in order to learn from their insights, ideas and experiences.

Universities could convene, host or support place-based initiatives involving community organisations, faith groups, businesses and volunteers in addition to members of their own academic community. They could offer premises to act as a hub

or for meeting spaces, advice on meaningful but light-touch data collection, on how to evaluate the relative effectiveness of new initiatives and they could use their convening power and intellectual and social capital to support and amplify such work.

## ***Case study: University of Glasgow***

In 2021, the University of Glasgow began an initiative seeking to engage its staff and students to tackle homelessness in the city.<sup>31</sup> Its motivation was to reflect the University's values and its broader civic strategy.

Proposed activities are still being developed. They include large-scale volunteering opportunities for students and staff in homelessness prevention activities and specialist support, such as giving free legal advice to tenants at risk of eviction. The University is looking at postgraduate micro credential courses for people working in homelessness, to be delivered free in partnership with the Scottish Funding Council. One is a postgraduate certificate for homelessness case workers, to launch in 2023/24. The University is also exploring work with secondary school teachers to develop educational resources about homelessness as part of Modern Studies courses.

A scoping research project seeks better understanding of homelessness in Glasgow and to identify areas for research by the University's academics, with the involvement of local homelessness organisations and people with direct experience of homelessness. One such project is intended to research homelessness among the University's own students, including students who are estranged from their families.

The University of Glasgow's homelessness initiative is intended to be a multi-year project and it has employed a part-time member of staff, Caragh Keith, as coordinator. It is actively supported by the University's senior management team, with joint oversight by David Duncan, the Chief Operating Officer, and Ken Gibb, a professor at the University who is director of the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence.



## Conclusion

Universities are among our most respected and successful institutions in the United Kingdom. Their unprecedented expansion in the 1990s, and again since 2010, has by and large secured that rare achievement of increasing capacity across, as well as within, higher education institutions while maintaining, and indeed enhancing, their reputational strength. To mix metaphors, we have not worried overly about who gets the largest slice of the cake; instead, we have grown the pie.

The success story of the UK's higher education sector offers hope to the challenge of ending homelessness. It is more than 50 years since the BBC television drama *Cathy Come Home*, directed by Ken Loach, propelled the issue of homelessness into our public consciousness.<sup>32</sup>

Since then, millions of people have given generously to charities to relieve homelessness. Legal protections have been built to support individuals and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Much important work is done by the state and local authorities to protect people from homelessness. Many vital services are offered by charities to support people affected by homelessness.

And yet, this most extreme form of poverty and social isolation is still with us.

This is the reason that the intellectual, civic and community power of universities has such critical potential to accelerate efforts to end homelessness in the UK for good. The current approach of mandated state action, supplemented by charities that combine the delivery of services with campaigning and fundraising, has not been enough.

It is time to think of how other civic actors, which can operate at pace and at scale, can break the impasse and bring new thinking, insights, resources and leadership to end the enduring scandal of homelessness. Universities are uniquely placed to take on this role.

Much great work goes on within higher education institutions to research, explain and prevent homelessness. And yet, too often these initiatives are led by individuals or teams in isolation, rather than as a cross-institution effort, as the University of Glasgow is developing, or sector-wide. If a significant number of universities were to rise to this challenge, the impact could be transformational.

#### *Ten steps universities can take*

1. greater investment in the expertise required to conduct robust evaluations into the effectiveness of interventions to address homelessness across academic disciplines and methodologies, to address the weakness of the current evidence base;
2. join the Homelessness Research Network supported by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Office for National Statistics and Centre for Homelessness Impact to share research insights and opportunities;
3. review curriculum content across teaching subjects to ensure that homelessness is considered and discussed in an evidence-led way, with accurate and person-centred language and non-stereotyping images;
4. involve people with personal experience of homelessness in the development and review of curriculum materials and the delivery of curriculum content;

5. develop evidence-based volunteering opportunities at scale for university students and staff to strengthen the prevention of homelessness;
6. use the role as employer to ensure recruitment practices are inclusive for people impacted by adversity and consider evaluating experimental models of supported employment for people experiencing homelessness;
7. Use property and estates to expand the supply of social housing or accommodation for people affected by homelessness and test new approaches to supporting sustained tenancies for people at risk of homelessness;
8. ensure admissions processes are open to potential applicants affected by homelessness, and support students with experience of or at risk of homelessness to ensure their success;
9. monitor students' housing stability, collect data and conduct research into homelessness among students; and
10. develop targeted support for students who experience homelessness, including direct financial support or subsidised or supported short-term tenancies in halls of residence or safe, affordable accommodation.





## Appendix: Homelessness in university towns, cities and communities

### England

Local authority	Population in 2011 census	Number of total applications	Number of total applications per 100k	Number of people rough sleeping	Number of people rough sleeping per 100k	Number of households in TA	Number of households in TA per 100k
Bath and North East Somerset	175,538	403	504.1	14	7.1	NA	NA
Birmingham	1,074,283	4,816	1,129.6	31	2.7	3,667	860.1
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	163,900	2,124	1,214.8	29	7.3	444	253
Brighton and Hove	272,952	NA	NA	37	12.5	NA	NA
Bristol, City of	428,074	3,493	1,773.8	68	14.3	NA	NA
Cambridge	122,725	698	1,594.0	14	11.2	106	242.1
Camden	220,087	1,203	1,053.2	97	35.2	541	473.7
Canterbury	150,600	850	1,261.1	18	10.8	121	179.5
Charnwood	165,876	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Cheltenham	115,645	573	1,103.1	8	6.8	18	34.7
City of London	7,412	12	280.1	20	227.9	4	93.4
Colchester	173,614	787	959.3	NA	NA	199	242.6
County Durham	512,994	2,676	1,129.4	11	2.1	NA	NA
Coventry	316,915	2,516	1,664.5	12	3.1	589	389.7

Local authority	Population in 2011 census	Number of total applications	Number of total applications per 100k	Number of people rough sleeping	Number of people rough sleeping per 100k	Number of households in TA	Number of households in TA per 100k
Derby	248,943	2,245	2,138.5	11	4.2	138	131.5
Eastbourne	99,308	NA	NA	10	9.6	NA	NA
Exeter	117,063	1,160	2,110.6	14	10.5	109	198.3
Greenwich	255,483	1,750	1,551.6	9	3.0	1,549	1373.4
Guildford	137,580	379	675.0	8	5.4	43	76.6
Hackney	247,182	2,224	1,848.0	11	3.8	NA	NA
Hammersmith and Fulham	182,445	1,076	1,316.4	NA	NA	NA	NA
Hillingdon	275,499	1,751	1,589.5	9	2.9	457	414.8
Islington	206,285	1,698	1,588.6	13	5.3	855	799.9
Kingston upon Hull, City of	256,123	2,672	2352.6	11	4.2	NA	NA
Kingston upon Thames	160,436	449	650.6	28	15.7	NA	NA
Kirklees	425,970	1,487	821.3	5	1.1	225	123
Lambeth	304,481	3,243	2,338.5	29	8.8	NA	NA
Lancaster	137,823	NA	NA	NA	NA	27	44.5
Leeds	750,683	6,277	1,880.0	25	3.1	67	20.1
Leicester	329,627	2,490	1,992.8	8	2.2	420	336.1
Lewisham	276,938	3,166	2,413.6	7	2.3	2,530	1928.8

Lincoln	93,085	626	1,508.6	14	14.1	49	118.1
Luton	203,641	1,625	2,098.8	7	3.1	1,132	1,464
Liverpool	465,656	1,260	561.8	20	4.0	362	161.4
Manchester	502,902	5,836	2,684.7	43	7.7	2,705	1244.4
Middlesbrough	138,368	987	1,731.3	NA	NA	36	63.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	279,092	1,632	1,308.6	9	3.0	NA	NA
Newcastle-under-Lyme	123,878	391	690.9	7	5.3	NA	NA
Newham	310,460	NA	NA	17	4.7	5,645	4914.4
Northampton	212,492	1,520	1,608.7	NA	NA	NA	NA
Norwich	132,158	746	1,175.4	10	7.0	9	14.2
Nottingham	303,899	2,847	2,186.0	23	6.9	474	363.9
Oadby and Wigston	55,979	153	730.6	NA	NA	NA	NA
Oxford	150,245	579	1,089.8	24	15.8	100	188.2
Plymouth	256,589	2,003	1,794.7	23	8.7	286	256.3
Portsmouth	205,433	2,050	2,267.4	24	11.0	143	158.2
Preston	140,054	NA	NA	6	4.2	33	56.4
Reading	155,339	1,404	2,146.5	22	13.4	172	263.0
Richmondshire	53,287	103	457.3	0	0.0	8	35.5
Runnymede	80,501	226	647.5	NA	NA	65	186.2
Rutland	37,581	86	499.9	NA	NA	1	5.8
Salford	234,487	2,592	2,220.8	8	3.0	334	286.2
Sheffield	551,756	2,918	1,186.5	18	3.0	394	160.2

Southampton	235,870	1,237	1,214.8	9	3.5	150	147.3
Southwark	288,717	3,669	2,736.9	10	3.1	3,142	2343.7
Sunderland	275,330	1,735	1,419.6	5	1.8	31	25
Tower Hamlets	256,012	2,042	1,495.4	28	8.3	NA	NA
Wandsworth	307,710	NA	NA	18	5.4	2,729	2010.6
Warwick	137,736	409	661.1	6	4.1	64	103.5
Wielwyn Hatfield	110,727	1,068	2,198.4	NA	NA	84	172.9
West Lancashire	110,617	139	297.2	0	0.0	10	21.4
Westminster	219,582	1,805	1,465.5	187	69.9	NA	NA
Winchester	116,820	289	568.3	NA	NA	43	84.6
Wolverhampton	249,852	2,409	2,250.2	5	1.9	29	26
Worcester	98,679	669	1,511.5	20	19.6	48	108.5
York	197,783	814	929.5	NA	NA	47	53.7
Universities total / average		1,643	1,416	22	13	649	484
<b>England</b>	<b>53,012,500</b>	<b>282,240</b>	<b>1,199</b>	<b>2,440</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>96,410</b>	<b>406</b>

## Scotland

Local authority	Population in 2011 census	Number of total applications	Number of total applications per 100k	Number of people rough sleeping	Number of people rough sleeping per 100k	Number of households in TA	Number of households in TA per 100k
Aberdeen	222,793	1,464	1,344	55	24	283	259.8
Dundee	145,570	1,433	2,027	85	57	457	646.4

Fife	65,1983	2,542	1,496	85	22	708	416.7
Edinburgh	483,000	2,171	906	115	21	2,168	905.7
Glasgow	593,245	6,335	2,141	370	58	2,668	902.0
Renfrewshire	90,574	832	953	20	11	180	206.3
Stirling	36,140	607	1,521	25	26	349	874.7
Universities total / average		2,198	1,485	108	32	973	602
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>5,254,800</b>	<b>33,792</b>	<b>1,348</b>	<b>1,470</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>13,097</b>

## Wales

Local authority	Population in 2011 census	Number of total applications	Number of total applications per 100k	Number of people rough sleeping	Number of people rough sleeping per 100k	Number of households in TA	Number of households in TA per 100k
Carmarthenshire	183,961	2,298	2,772	0	0	96	115
Cardiff	346,100	4,977	3,184	57	15	462	295
Ceredigion	75,900	444	1,413	9	12	54	171
Gwynedd	121,900	300	544	0	0	237	429
Rhondda Cynon Taf	234,400	1,419	1,334	1	0.4	120	112
Swansea	239,000	2,646	2,411	19	7	135	123
Wrexham	134,800	906	1,534	21	15	NA	NA
Universities Total / average		2,165	2,198	18	8.4	220	249
<b>Wales</b>	<b>3,063,758</b>	<b>31,320</b>	<b>2,288</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2,325</b>	<b>170</b>



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