



1) Determine your strategic goals

It may seem obvious, but having a firm idea of where you want to end up is a good place to start! What are the drivers for new accommodation- is it quantity, improving quality, location, transferring risk, financial considerations or some combination of these. Time spent developing a robust accommodation strategy, supported by the University's senior management, will give structure to the process and confidence to stakeholders.

2) Research the market

Most universities will have a good understanding of the market they operate in, but planning for new accommodation is a good opportunity to test that understanding. What is the current supply/demand picture locally, where are your students choosing to live, what product is available and at what price points, what are the private providers offering compared to the University and is the HMO market a consideration?

3) Engage with students

You will already be talking to your current (and potentially your future) students in some form - does that include obtaining their views on where they want to live? Expectations change and understanding the impact of these on the end product will help guide decisions throughout the process of securing new accommodation. Social media platforms and websites such as Student Crowd are a great way to find out what students really think about the accommodation you are putting them in.

4) Think about location

Determining the location for any new accommodation will be driven by many factors, not least the availability of land. Perhaps you are looking to support a new campus or maybe provide additional accommodation for an existing one. Whatever the reason, your students will value a location where they feel safe, where they can get to and from campus easily, where there is access to a range of shops & food outlets, good transport links, some night life, opportunities for part-time work and leisure facilities.

5) Investigate delivery options

Times have changed and, sitting alongside the traditional University fund/build/operate model, are a number of alternatives. Most University towns/cities now have some private sector student accommodation and there is no harm in finding out what is on offer and whether that could meet your needs. Partnering with the private sector providers in some form either formally (lease/hard nominations) or informally (soft nominations/referral arrangement) can be a good way to secure new accommodation quickly, to iron out short term supply/demand imbalances and to transfer the risks that come with developing and operating in-house. Most private providers will be very happy to have such a discussion and leveraging the value in your covenant can also be a way to secure well priced accommodation for your students. Your strategy will help determine which delivery model gives you the right balance of risk, reward and control.

6) Make sure your accommodation supports student wellbeing

Building design, building specification and building management all have a part to play here. Studio flats may produce higher rents but, in large numbers, are not always conducive to good student experience. Well designed cluster flats and town houses will help promote a sense of community especially if the common areas are welcoming and accessible. Quality of furniture, bed size, good sound proofing, fast & reliable Wi-Fi and the ability to control the internal environment all score well with students and will help make them feel at home. But it is possible to be unhappy in even the best accommodation and this is where good management will help. A well trained, friendly and approachable team (including cleaning, maintenance and security staff) can really help to create a vibrant community and also spot those students who may be struggling with the halls experience so that support can be put in place. Sometimes only a small intervention is required to improve the situation for an individual student.

7) Think about affordability

There is no easy answer to this - for newly built accommodation, savings that can be made through design, specification and construction will have a relatively limited direct impact on rents. Twin rooms and shared facility accommodation may have a part to play but they are increasingly a harder product to 'sell' to students. Modelling rents (and contract lengths) will help you to see where any new accommodation will sit in terms of the existing supply but it may be that some form of cross-subsidy is required or re-balancing of rents across an existing portfolio to ensure a range.

8) Think about the future

For universities who have chosen to invest in their own accommodation then it is worth having one eye on the future. If the demand picture changes dramatically, has the building been designed in such a way that it could potentially be converted to an alternative use, for example private residential or even another University related activity. Even if it remains in student accommodation use, IT and other infrastructure will need to be updated during the life of a building and this can be a much easier process if some thought has been given to it during the original design stage.

9) Continue to invest

If maintenance obligations for a particular building rest with the University then a structured long term maintenance programme is the best way to help keep accommodation looking fresh and performing well both financially and in terms of the student experience. Budgeting for regular 'refreshes' of any common areas along with more extensive periodic refurbishments is sensible although requires a disciplined financial approach, which is not always easy in the face of competing demands on capital.

10) Would you live here?

Your student days may be far behind you but there is still no harm and standing back and asking yourself "would I live in this hall or would I be happy for my son/daughter to live there?" If the answer is yes then chances are you have come to the right decision- if not, then is that something which can be easily addressed or is it something more fundamental. Getting your accommodation offering right doesn't need to be difficult but getting it wrong will be costly on many levels.



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