



RENT NEGOTIATION TRAINING

Anna-Tina Jashapara

VPC&C

Vpcandc@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk

Lucia Akard SU Advice

Hanne Clark SU Advice and Student
Representation

Advice@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk



In today's workshop, we will cover:

1. Rent negotiation structure
2. What factors are considered when colleges set rent?
 - Inflation
 - Affordability
3. Lobbying Tactics
4. Negotiation Tips



INTRODUCTION

Why are rent negotiations important?

*In most colleges, rent negotiations take place on an **annual basis**. Their purpose is to ensure that **rates of rent** and the **quality of accommodation provided** in college are acceptable not just to college authorities but also to the students themselves.*

When do rent negotiations happen?

It's up to the college to decide on a timeframe for decision making. Some will complete the rents and charges process in Hilary, but others won't finish this until the end of Trinity.

TIP: Find out the key deadlines and work the process backwards. If you don't think you've been given enough time, you can lobby for the decision to be delayed.



**RENT
NEGOTIATION
TRAINING**

1. Structure of rent negotiations

This structure will vary from college to college, so be sure to ask what the timeline and specific structure is.

A good place to start is with a series of informal meetings between student representatives and the relevant college contact, usually the estates bursar, or the domestic bursar.



Then, you might have one or two meetings with the college's Finance Committee. These will be more formal, and are good opportunity to present a detailed case to college.



Outcomes from these meetings are presented to Governing Body, who discuss the proposals further before voting on them.

If your college **doesn't** negotiate annually:

*Some common rooms will have agreed with college that rent will be **fixed for a certain period**, or that **rent will rise by a predetermined amount** for that year. This doesn't mean you can't negotiate! Rent negotiations can be a really useful time to negotiate **other factors** of college life, for example, food charges, gym membership, or provision of sanitary products.*

Given the inflationary situation, colleges might be hoping to change rents more than other years so this is a key year to ensure you're involved in the negotiation.

*If you do not have annual rent negotiations between your common room and college, this is something you could **lobby the college to commit to**.*



2. Factors Colleges Consider When Setting Rent:

Inflation, Benchmarking & Affordability



Understanding Inflation

Inflation is a measure of how much the prices of goods (such as food or televisions) and services (such as haircuts or train tickets) have gone up over time. If inflation is 3%, it means prices are 3% higher (on average) than they were a year ago

CPIH, OOH component and CPI annual inflation rates for the last 10 years, UK, November 2012 to November 2022



What this means for rents

When inflation rises, the costs to your college will also increase and they are likely to want to pass on at least some of this cost to students.

However, you could argue that they should protect students in exceptional years of high inflation, and find this other money elsewhere (e.g. through their conference charges).

Some universities have committed to absorb costs given the high inflation.

Examples of universities absorbing the cost



'Like most things, the cost of renting has gone up. The university absorbed 80% of the increase in accommodation costs for halls where they are the landlord, reducing the impact on students from 12.3% to 2.4%' (statement September 2022)



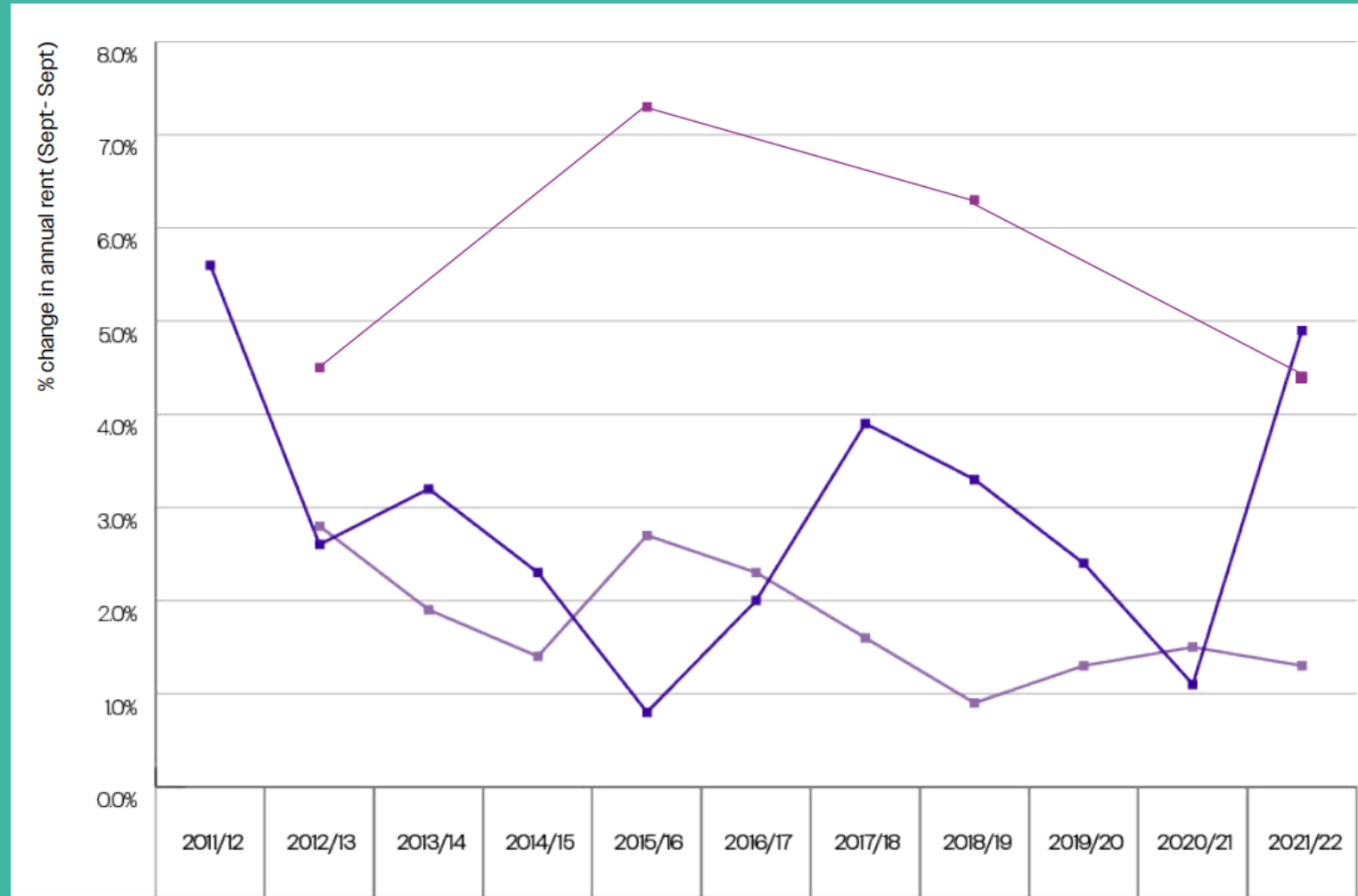
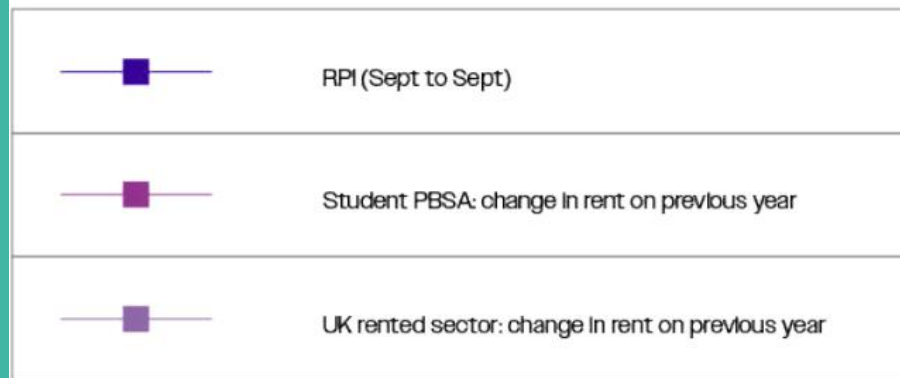
'To protect students from rising bills, we've fixed prices for our accommodation since November 2021. Rent for University residences includes all utilities, and the University will absorb the rises in energy costs.' (statement October 2022)



Student Accommodation & Inflation

Accommodation built for students often rises at a higher rate than inflation each year, on average.

Overall annual rent increases vs Retail Prices Index vs housing rental prices, 2011/12 - 2021/22



Benchmarking

College	Average cost of accommodation for 175 days, including utilities and services	Most common rent that students actually pay, including utilities and services	Number of days this rent is for	Indication of likely costs for three meals a day for 175 days	Indication of likely costs for accommodation and meals for 175 days
Balliol	£4,700	£7,275	189	£2,312*	£7,012*
Brasenose	£4,571	£4,907	186	£1,386	£5,957
Christ Church	£5,054	£5,025	174	£2,228	£7,282
Corpus Christi	£4,566	£4,608	180	£2,009	£6,575
Exeter	£4,858	£4,759	174	£2,459	£7,317

from the University of Oxford

Affordability & Cost of Living

Another factor your college may consider is the affordability for students of their accommodation. They may use the fact that some sources of funding have increased (UKRI stipend, Oxford Bursaries) to justify rent increases but it's important to point out most students are not seeing a funding increase in line with inflation.

Whether housing is affordable is often measured by the proportion of income being spend on housing. Shelter argue that 35% of income should be spent on housing for it to be affordable



Undergraduate Affordability & Cost of Living

For undergraduates, one way of measuring affordability which is used is through arguing that 50% of the maximum maintenance loan is a broadly 'affordable' rent. For 2022/23, this is £4893.

However you can also point out that incomes for students are not going up in line with inflation so rents shouldn't either:

- Oxford Bursaries and Crankstart bursaries have [increased by £500](#).
- *BUT maintenance loans have only gone up by 2.3% for UK students living out of London and away from their parents, in comparison to inflation at 11.1% (according to the CPI as of October 2022)*

Postgraduate Affordability & Cost of Living

Postgraduates

- As postgraduates don't receive maintenance loans, it can be harder to measure income and what is affordable.
- UKRI has increased their stipends by 13%, and Oxford has matched this, meaning that some postgrad stipends have risen from £16,062 to £17,668 – your college may use this information to justify large rent increases
- However, these stipend increases only impact certain students, and [only 49% of postgraduate students have full or partial funding](#).
- *This means that many postgraduate students are exposed to the increase in cost of living and inflation without necessarily a corresponding increase in their income.*

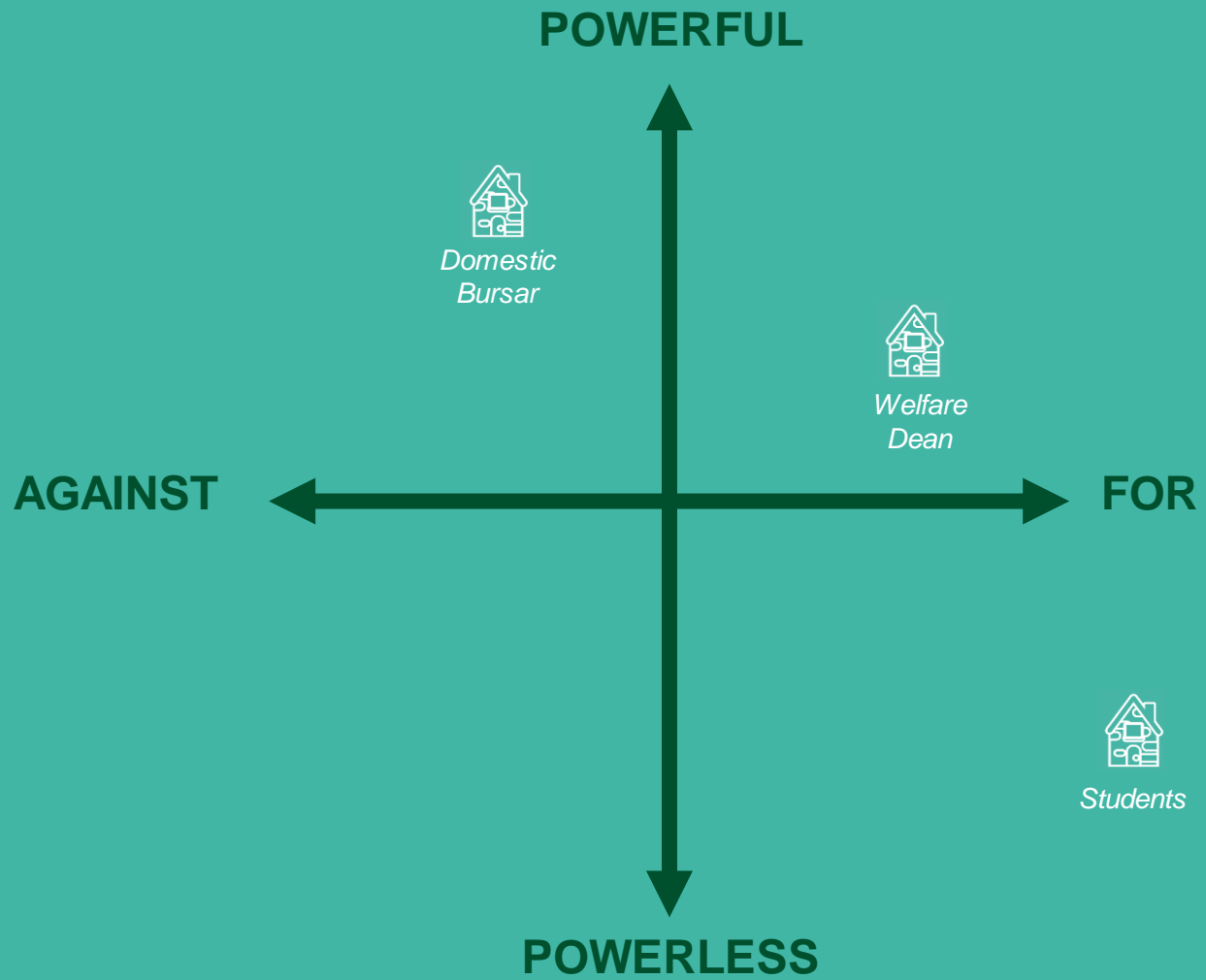
3. Strategy & Lobbying

Tactics:

Getting the Governing Body on board

Who you have to convince, *how* you can do that,
and *what* things you can do.

→ **POWER MAPPING**



What to look for in your **TEAM**

- *Skills and Specialisms, College Relationships, Broad Support and Mandates*



Take a **HOLISTIC APPROACH**

- *Food prices / quality? More accommodation, Vac Res? Improvements to your Common Room? Other College Facilities?*



Getting your **common room** on board

- **Explain the issue** - some students might not even know there's a problem with rent prices if they've got a good deal personally, or have never rented anywhere else
- **Open Meetings** where you can hear concerns, gather evidence, and get students on board with your campaign
- **Listen** - is there something your campaign is missing, e.g. a group of students you've forgotten about?



Showing college that **STUDENTS SUPPORT THIS**

- *Motions in your JCR/MCR demonstrate support from your students*
- *Gathering **data** through **surveys** can show the extent of the problem – and how much it's affecting students*



LOBBYING TACTICS

- **Get a seat at the table** – keep asking your college to invite you to meetings where these decisions are made – and use them to push for your demands
- **Get an ally** - is there a key member of college staff who's on your side? Can they raise this issue at a higher level that you can?
- **Ask a Sabb** to email a key stakeholder for you, to show that the SU supports what you're asking for
- **Request that your college provide data and evidence that costs are in fact rising in line with inflation**



Demonstrating Impact

STUDENT INCOME	PER TERM
Maintenance loan	
Money from family	
Scholarships/grants/bursaries	
Income from permitted work	
Savings	
Any other income	
TOTAL INCOME	

STUDENT EXPENSES	PER TERM
Rent	
Battels/Food	
Laundry	
Printing	
Course materials	
Social	
Clothes	
Travel	
Misc	
Emergencies/unforeseen	
TOTAL EXPENSES	

This is the clearest way to illustrate that a rent increase will or will not put students into debt.

Suggested termly rent increase	Surplus/deficit income post increase	Feasible for students to avoid debt.
£		Y/N

Success Stories

College X had increased the rent annually for a long period despite rent negotiations with students. With the use of a financial statement showing the detriment to students if the proposed increase in the particular year was made, the College team agreed to freeze the rent for a two-year period.

After negotiations, College Y agreed to the students' proposals, and agreed to create a student housing officer role and invited them to sit on the College Bursars' meeting/committees.



Basics of **WRITING PROPOSALS**

What do you want?

Making your proposals succinct and clear

Why do you want it?

Current situation, and why it isn't acceptable

(if relevant) College's proposal, and why you can't accept it

How you are backing up what you want

Using your data

4. NEGOTIATIONS: Top Tips

- *Try not to get intimidated* - you have a **right** to be involved in deciding rent levels, and more importantly, you have the responsibility of representing the students.
- *Be mindful of tone in emails and conversations depending on your college situation.*
- *Make sure that **every offer or concession is recorded**, and that a written record is made of every meeting.*
- *Get a **clear timeline** from your college at the start of negotiations so you know when you need to have come to a decision by.*
- *Try to talk in terms of 'we' rather than 'I'. It makes the negotiations less personal, sounds more impressive, and **encourages the college to view you as a representative, rather than as an individual.***

And finally...

Try to keep an **accurate record** of the rent negotiation process, including the **final agreement** that you reached and the **process** through which you went to reach this. Include **lessons** that you learnt along the way. This will be invaluable to the people who have to conduct the next set of rent negotiations.

Good Luck



Any **QUESTIONS?**



Get in touch

Anna-Tina Jashapara
vpcandc@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk

Lucia Akard & Hanne Clark
Advice

Advice@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk

