



Phone 04 463 7406  
Email [welfare@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:welfare@vuwsa.org.nz)

TO	Wellington City Council
FROM	Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA)
DATE	April 29 2016
SUBJECT	Submission to the Consultation Document on the on the Annual Plan 2016/17

1. Introduction
2. Key Recommendations
3. Cold, Damp Rental Housing
4. Low Carbon Capital Plan
5. Further Comments
6. Contact



Phone 04 463 7406  
Email [welfare@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:welfare@vuwsa.org.nz)

## 1. Introduction

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA) functions to represent and advocate for the interests of Victoria University of Wellington's 22,000 students.

VUWSA currently has over 15,000 members, representing some 70% of Victoria University students. VUWSA is a democratic organisation; run by students for students. We are committed to fair representation and work tirelessly to consult with our members on issues of campus, city, and national importance.

Students play a central role in maintaining and growing Wellington's thriving economy. Victoria University alone directly contributes \$1 billion to the city each year, and this figure is growing. When combined with other universities and PTEs in the region, the student contribution reaches \$2 billion.

Students are also an invaluable part of the Wellington community, and contribute strongly to Wellington's vibrant and dynamic culture. They also make up a significant proportion of the part-time workforce.

VUWSA believes that one of the key reasons students choose to study at Victoria is because they want to experience what the city has to offer. Students value Wellington.

However, there are some key issues that make being a student in Wellington a real struggle. Improving on these aspects will enhance liveability, attract more domestic and international students, as well as retain a larger number of talented graduates; transforming Wellington into a genuinely student-friendly city.



Phone 04 463 7406  
Email [welfare@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:welfare@vuwsa.org.nz)

## **2. Key Recommendations**

### **That Wellington City Council:**

**2.1** Include provisions in the Annual Plan 2015/16 to implement a Rental Warrant of Fitness (WoF) in Wellington.

**2.2** Introduce separated waste stations around the city to encourage recycling and waste minimisation; and provide more information on how to reduce household waste.

**2.3** Publicly throw its weight behind a tertiary student fair for public transport in Wellington, and allocate money in the Annual Plan to make a significant contribution to the funding of it.

**2.4** Fulfil their commitment to becoming a Living Wage Council by matching the current NZ Living Wage rate, extending the Living Wage to all CCO staff and contractors, and put a plan in place to become fully-accredited as a Living Wage employer by June 2018.



Phone 04 463 7406  
Email [welfare@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:welfare@vuwsa.org.nz)

### **3. Cold, Damp Rental Housing**

The biggest barrier between current living standards for students in Wellington, and a decent quality of life, is inadequate housing.

The combination of a lack of supply, exorbitant rental prices, and poor quality, result in an extremely difficult situation for students in which a decent home is out of reach for all but a lucky few.

The Council can be congratulated for their efforts to improve the standard of housing in Wellington over the last few years through upgrades to much of the city's social housing, and installing insulation in low-income homes through the Government's *Warm Up NZ* scheme. The Annual Plan shows a desire to continue this effort by kick-starting new affordable housing projects through the Urban Development Agency, and continuing the insulation rollout.

Despite this positive work, students have missed out on these benefits, and will continue to be overlooked according to the draft Annual Plan. By and large we do not live in social housing, and such is the nature of short-term tenancies that there is little incentive for students to engage with Warm Up Wellington as they will see little or no benefit before moving house.

#### **3.1 Addressing the biggest issue**

Of the three major housing problems facing students in Wellington (supply, cost, and quality), quality of housing is the area where Council can make the biggest difference.

This is widely known, and was reflected in a commendable step by the Mayor and other councillors to support the implementation of a Rental Warrant of Fitness (WoF) in Wellington, a move which is also advocated for by health experts. (1)

A Rental WoF is the only way to truly bring houses in Wellington up to a standard that is liveable by ridding them of the cold and mould that is currently making students and many other renters sick.

(1) <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/ppp-online/child-and-youth-fuel-poverty-assessing-the-known-and-unknown/>



Phone 04 463 7406  
Email [welfare@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:welfare@vuwsa.org.nz)

### **3.2 The Government's 'Minimum Standards' do not go far enough**

The move by Central Government to introduce some minimum standards for rental housing was credible in its intention at the outset. However, these intentions were poorly implemented, and as such, will not make any real impact on housing quality for students or other renters. This view is also endorsed by health experts (1).

Specifically, the Amendment to the Residential Tenancies Act has included:

- **Inadequate provisions for insulation** (of a standard that pre dates the current building code)
- **No provision for heating**
- **No provision for ventilation**

Without adequate insulation, ventilation and heating, the cold and mould that plagues student flats throughout Wellington will continue to make students sick, and undermine their ability to be successful at University.

**These student experiences help to demonstrate the dire reality that is the norm for many:**

*"... every night myself and my flatmates went to bed with two pairs of pants, a couple of jumpers, a puffer jacket, multiple socks and beanies on just to stay warm. There were nights in the middle of winter where I would shiver so much I couldn't sleep. Even with an electric blanket."*

**Tori Sellwood, Victoria University of Wellington student**

*"...when winter hit, an unwelcome guest began to creep into my room. Mould began to grow, rapidly and relentlessly. Black mould on the walls, blue mould on my furniture and green mould on my clothes. My room displayed a colour spectrum of mould, and despite all efforts, there was nothing I could do about it. My dehumidifier was taking out anything between one to two litres of water a day, yet the thick, cold air in my room never quite seemed to lift."*

**Kayla Healy, Ex Victoria University student**



Phone 04 463 7406

Email [welfare@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:welfare@vuwsa.org.nz)

The Council should not use this failed action by Central Government as a reason to put a Rental WoF on the back burner, or to put it in the 'too hard basket'. The need for it is as strong as ever before.

VUWSA recommends that the WCC includes provisions to implement a strategy that further improves the quality of housing in rental properties.

#### **4. Low Carbon Capital Plan**

Current and future students are part of the cohort of citizens who will most acutely experience the effects of climate change. It is imperative the WCC invest in environmentally sustainable initiatives and infrastructure in order to reduce the city's carbon emissions, as well as make it affordable for all to use the infrastructure. VUWSA commends the WCC on the city's emissions reduction of 2.1% since 2001, and the vast majority of the plans laid out in the Low Carbon Capital Plan are extremely positive and well thought out. However, we believe there are some areas that can be adjusted in order to give the city the best chance of reaching the 2050 targets.

##### **4.1 Leading by example**

The WCC states that one of its main sources of carbon emissions is from landfill. As such, there is certainly room for improvement here. VUWSA acknowledges the importance of waste reduction, as well as the need for better opportunities for recycling around the city before our rubbish reaches the waste management facilities.

##### **4.2 Waste separation and reduction**

VUWSA commends WCC's focus on the importance of reduction and efficiency when it comes to the use of resources. We strongly support ongoing initiatives such as the Smart Energy Challenge, Sustainability Trust, and education work by Council's waste minimisation team. Reduction is always the preferred option when it comes to the use of resources.

However, we also believe that recycling can play a more prominent role particularly in public spaces. Separated waste stations in public spaces are becoming the norm in cities around the world to replace the traditional rubbish bin. Introducing such stations around Wellington City would go a step towards the reduction of waste that ends up in the landfill. WCC should take a lead on this issue, which will encourage other businesses and institutions, such as the University, to follow suit. Introducing such bins would go some way in educating more people on the importance of separating and recycling.



Phone 04 463 7406  
Email [welfare@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:welfare@vuwsa.org.nz)

As stated, VUWSA acknowledges the importance of waste reduction and supports the WCC's work towards getting a network of drinking fountains around the city. Particularly, the installation of more drinking fountains has reduced the need for single-use plastic bottles by giving people the opportunity to refill their bottles while out and about in town. Such initiatives incentivise environmentally responsible behaviour at the individual level, and will ideally encourage other institutions to follow suit.

A big part of implementing effective waste minimisation and reduction initiatives is providing the education on how to utilise them. Providing access to sufficient information about how to recycle and reduce waste will also incentivise good behaviour.

#### **4.3 Changing the way we move**

VUWSA supports the WCC's plan to invest in the public transport network, cycleways, and footpaths to reduce car use and ownership. A significant proportion of the student body already uses either active modes of transport, or public transportation. Investing in cycleways would increase the number of students and other residents cycling. It has been demonstrated in cities around the world that up to eighty-five percent of the effect on increasing cycling is the result of infrastructure.

Investing in the public transport system – especially with better connections between bus and rail – would also encourage students who live out of the city limits and who would otherwise drive to university, to opt for public transport.

#### **4.4 Affordable public transport**

Another barrier for students is the cost associated with public transport. For a student traveling to university and back five times a week, the cost of getting to class can be at the expense of paying rent or having a meal. Additionally, it encourages students to drive to university, as the weekly cost of taking the bus can be close to the cost of driving a car, or even more for students who live in some of the outer parts of the city.

This situation is not conducive with the city's goal of being a student-friendly city and attracting people from around the country and the world to study in Wellington. Nor does it align with the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets as laid out in the Low Carbon Capital Plan.

While the provision of public transport is in the domain of the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC), it is in the interest of WCC to throw their weight behind fairer fares for students.



Phone 04 463 7406  
Email [welfare@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:welfare@vuwsa.org.nz)

VUWSA believes the 50 percent discount on all public transport that high school students currently get should be extended to tertiary students. Tertiary students are generally in a more difficult financial position what with balancing debts and the rising costs of living; and are also contributing to Wellington as ratepayers. This is in comparison to high school students, most of whom have their transport paid for by their parents. Tertiary students are equally deserving of receiving this discount. Extending the tertiary fares to all students is both the equitable and economically sensible thing to do.

## 5. Further Comments

VUWSA is supportive of WCC's decision to increase the allocation of funding to implement the Living Wage by \$250,000. As a member of the Living Wage Movement Aotearoa we see it as vital the Council take leadership to improve the lives of Wellingtonians by paying decent wages to its staff.

We support and endorse the recommendations made by Living Wage Wellington for the Council to fulfil its commitment to become a living wage organisation by:

- **Matching the minimum rate paid to the Council workforce to the current NZ Living Wage rate**
- **Extending the Living Wage to all workers in CCOs and workers employed via contractors in a staged implementation**
- **Putting a plan in place to become a fully-accredited Living Wage employer by June 2018**

## 6. Contact

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss this submission in more detail in person. Please contact us if further clarification of this submission is needed, or to arrange for VUWSA to make an oral submission.

**Rory Lenihan-Ikin**  
**Welfare Vice President**  
**Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association**

---

PO Box 600, Wellington 6140

[welfare@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:welfare@vuwsa.org.nz)  
DDI: 04 463 7406 | M: 021 202 0979  
[www.vuwsa.org.nz](http://www.vuwsa.org.nz)