

acuho-i-sac
Making Campus Home

IN TOUCH

20 Years of Connection, Care, and Community

OCTOBER 2026



Twenty Years In Touch

As we mark the 20-year anniversary of the ACUHO-I Southern Africa Chapter, this edition of In Touch is both a celebration and a moment of reflection.

For two decades, this community has remained in touch with something deeply important — not only with the operational realities of student housing, but with the people, relationships, and purpose that give it meaning. In a sector often defined by systems, structures, and services, it is connection that has quietly sustained our work: connection to students navigating transition, to colleagues shaping practice, and to institutions responding to a rapidly changing higher education landscape.

This anniversary edition honours that journey.

Over the past 20 years, student housing in Southern Africa has evolved significantly. What was once primarily an accommodation-focused function has become an integrated ecosystem of student success — encompassing wellbeing, leadership development, inclusion, safety, facilities management, and community building. Yet, across this evolution, one truth has remained constant: residence life is one of the most powerful spaces for shaping belonging in higher education.

The theme of this edition — 20 Years of Connection, Care, and Community — reflects this continuity and change. It recognises that student housing is not built by one role, one function, or one perspective. It is built through the collective effort of many: professional staff, student leaders, facilities teams, support

services, and institutional partners who, together, create environments where students can live, learn, and grow.

In this issue, you will find stories that reflect the breadth of this work. From student voices and leadership development, to operational excellence, wellbeing systems, and institutional innovation, each contribution speaks to a shared commitment: staying in touch with the needs of students and the evolving demands of our sector.

Importantly, this publication also looks forward. As we reflect on 20 years of growth, we are reminded that the future of student housing will require continued collaboration, adaptability, and care. The challenges facing students today are complex, and so too must be our responses. Yet within this complexity lies opportunity — to deepen our practice, strengthen our communities, and reimagine what student housing can be.

To all who have contributed to this journey over the past two decades — thank you. Your work, often unseen but always felt, has shaped the experiences of countless students across our institutions.

May this edition of In Touch serve not only as a record of where we have been, but as an invitation to remain connected to where we are going — together.

Warm regards,
Bes Liebenberg

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When Betting Becomes a Student Success Issue

Twenty Years of Shaping Student Housing Excellence

Honouring Our Legacy, Building Our Future

Jay Pillay
President
ACUHO-I Southern African Chapter

It is both a privilege and a profound honour to welcome you to this commemorative edition of IN Touch Magazine as we celebrate a remarkable milestone in the history of our Association—20 years of ACUHO-I Southern African Chapter (ACUHO-I SAC).

This anniversary is far more than a celebration of longevity. It is a celebration of vision, courage, partnership and the unwavering belief that student housing is fundamental to student success. It is an opportunity to honour the pioneers who recognised, twenty years ago, that student accommodation deserved its own professional voice within higher education; a voice that would advocate for quality, influence policy, develop professionals and create environments where students do more than simply reside; they belong, grow and flourish.

Over the past two decades, ACUHO-I SAC has evolved from a small network of committed residence professionals into the recognised professional association representing student housing and residence life across Southern Africa. What began as a platform for collaboration has become a respected community of practice that continues to shape institutional thinking, influence national conversations and promote excellence across our universities and colleges.

The higher education landscape has changed dramatically over these twenty years. Student demographics have evolved, enrolments have increased, financial pressures have intensified, and the expectations placed upon universities have grown exponentially. Student housing has found itself at the centre of these changes. No longer viewed simply as accommodation management, residence life has become an essential contributor to student development, academic achievement, wellbeing and institutional success.

Today's residence professionals are expected to be educators, crisis managers, mentors, counsellors, operational experts, compliance specialists, community builders and strategic leaders. They navigate increasingly complex environments while remaining steadfast in their commitment to creating safe, inclusive and supportive communities where every student has the opportunity to succeed.

One of ACUHO-I SAC's greatest achievements has been elevating student housing into a recognised profession. Through RV-SHTI, conferences, leadership institutes, regional workshops, communities of practice and

professional development programmes, we have invested in the people who dedicate their careers to supporting students. We have promoted the sharing of knowledge, encouraged innovation and fostered a culture of continuous improvement that strengthens institutions across our region.

Professionalisation remains one of our defining priorities. The work undertaken to develop standards, promote accreditation and encourage evidence-based practice is helping institutions benchmark themselves against internationally recognised best practice while remaining responsive to the unique realities of Southern Africa. Our commitment to quality assurance is not about compliance alone; it is about ensuring that every student experiences a residence environment that supports learning, personal growth and holistic development.

As an Association, we have also recognised that the future of student housing cannot be separated from the broader challenges facing higher education.

Student wellbeing has become one of the defining priorities of our profession. Mental health concerns continue to increase across our campuses, requiring residence teams to develop new skills, stronger referral systems and more compassionate approaches to student support. Residences have become places where students seek belonging, connection and safety during some of the most challenging periods of their lives.

Similarly, Gender-Based Violence remains one of the greatest threats to student safety and dignity. This past year, ACUHO-I SAC has been privileged to contribute to national discussions through our participation in the Higher Health Gender-Based Violence Technical Task Team. This work acknowledges what residence professionals have long understood; that student accommodation occupies a critical position in preventing violence, supporting survivors and fostering cultures built on respect, accountability and human dignity. Our responsibility extends beyond responding to incidents; it includes creating environments where violence is actively prevented through education, leadership and community engagement.

Transformation, diversity and inclusion continue to define our journey. Student residences are among the most diverse communities within higher education. They bring together individuals from different cultures, languages, identities and lived experiences. This diversity enriches our institutions, but it also challenges us to create communities founded on respect, belonging and equity. ACUHO-I SAC remains committed to promoting inclusive residence environments where every student feels seen,



valued and empowered.

Technology is reshaping every aspect of our profession. Digital access systems, data-informed decision-making, artificial intelligence, smart facilities management and innovative student engagement platforms are transforming how residence operations are managed. Yet, as we embrace technological advancement, we remain mindful that our greatest strength will always be our people. Technology should enhance the student experience; it should never replace the human relationships that define exceptional residence life.

Sustainability has also emerged as a strategic imperative. Universities increasingly recognise that student housing must contribute meaningfully to environmental stewardship, responsible resource management and sustainable infrastructure development. Residence professionals are uniquely positioned to cultivate environmentally conscious communities while ensuring that facilities remain financially sustainable and operationally efficient for future generations.

Throughout these twenty years, partnerships have been central to our success. Our collaboration with universities, government

departments, student affairs practitioners, Higher Health, international colleagues through ACUHO-I and numerous sector stakeholders has demonstrated that the complex challenges facing higher education cannot be solved in isolation. Collective leadership remains our greatest strength.

While we celebrate our achievements, we also recognise the work that still lies ahead. Across Southern Africa, many students continue to experience housing shortages, affordability challenges, ageing infrastructure and unequal access to quality accommodation. These realities remind us that our mission is far from complete. Every student deserves access to accommodation that is safe, secure, inclusive and conducive to academic success. This remains our collective responsibility.

As President, I have had the privilege of representing ACUHO-I SAC at institutional, national and international platforms. Every engagement has reaffirmed the importance of our profession and the extraordinary commitment of our members. I remain inspired by residence practitioners who continue to innovate despite limited resources, who lead with compassion during times of crisis and who understand that every interaction with a student

has the potential to change a life.

This commemorative edition of IN Touch reflects the incredible work taking place across our institutions. It celebrates innovation, recognises excellence, shares emerging practice and showcases the individuals whose passion continues to strengthen student housing throughout Southern Africa.

To our founding members, past Presidents, Executive Boards, volunteers, institutional representatives, residence staff, student leaders, partners and sponsors, we extend our deepest appreciation. Your vision, dedication and service have shaped not only this Association but also the lives of countless students whose futures have been transformed through quality residence experiences.

As we celebrate twenty years, we do not simply look back with pride, we look forward with purpose.

The next chapter of ACUHO-I SAC will demand visionary leadership, stronger research, deeper collaboration, enhanced professional standards and continued advocacy for student-centred housing. It will require us to embrace innovation without losing sight of our values, to strengthen

our influence within higher education policy, and to ensure that student housing remains recognised as a strategic contributor to institutional excellence and student success.

Our legacy has never been measured by the buildings we manage.

It is measured by the communities we create. It is measured by the professionals we develop. It is measured by the students whose lives are changed because someone believed that where they live matters as much as where they learn.

As we commemorate twenty years of excellence, let us honour our past by continuing to shape the future with integrity, innovation, compassion and purpose.

Together, we will continue building residences that are not simply places to live, but places where leaders are developed, communities are strengthened and futures begin.

Happy 20th Anniversary, ACUHO-I SAC.

Twenty Years of Staying In Touch

The Story of a Community



Across Southern African higher education, student housing has never been just about buildings. It has always been about people — students finding their place, staff shaping environments of care, and institutions navigating the evolving demands of student success.

The 20-year journey of the ACUHO-I Southern Africa Chapter reflects this reality. It is a story not only of professionalization and growth, but of connection: connection across institutions, across roles, and across generations of practitioners committed to improving the student experience.

When the chapter began, the focus of student housing was often narrowly defined: accommodation provision, logistical coordination, and operational management. Over time, however, the sector has undergone a profound transformation. Student housing is now recognized as a critical part of the higher education ecosystem — one that contributes directly to student success, wellbeing, leadership development, and institutional culture.

This shift did not happen by chance. It was shaped by years of collaboration, learning, and shared practice among professionals who understood that residence life is one of the most influential environments in a student's journey. Within residences, students do not only live — they learn how to belong, how to lead, how to navigate difference, and how to engage with complexity.

At the heart of this evolution is a simple but powerful idea: staying in touch.

Staying in touch with students and their lived realities.

Staying in touch with colleagues across institutions and contexts.

Staying in touch with emerging challenges in wellbeing, equity, and access.

And staying in touch with the deeper purpose of student housing work — to enable environments where students can thrive.

This ongoing connection has enabled innovation across multiple dimensions of practice. Residence life programmes have expanded to include leadership development and peer engagement. Wellbeing support systems have become more integrated and responsive. Facilities management has evolved to prioritise safety, sustainability, and student experience. Student governance structures have created stronger platforms for voice and participation.

Yet, alongside these developments, the sector has also faced significant challenges. Changing student demographics, increasing mental health concerns, resource constraints, and shifting expectations of higher education have required constant adaptation. In this context, the role of student housing professionals has become more complex, demanding not only technical expertise but also emotional intelligence, collaboration, and resilience.

What emerges from 20 years of practice is not a single narrative, but a shared one: progress built through collective effort.

No institution has shaped this journey alone. Instead, it has been the strength of community — within and across institutions — that has enabled growth. It is this spirit of collaboration that defines the chapter's legacy and continues to guide its future.

As we reflect on two decades of development, we are also invited to consider what comes next. The future of student housing in Southern Africa will be shaped by how well we continue to stay in touch — with students, with each other, and with the changing landscape of higher education.

This means deepening our commitment to inclusive practice, strengthening systems of care, investing in leadership development, and embracing innovation that responds meaningfully to student needs. It also means holding onto the human core of our work: the understanding that every policy, every residence, every programme, and every intervention ultimately exists to support a student trying to find their place in the world.

Twenty years on, the story of this community is still being written.

And as it continues, the most important question may not be what we have achieved — but how we will continue, together, to stay in touch.

Celebrating 20 Years Together

Benita van Zyl
Manager: Residence Student Communities | Stellenbosch University

As ACUHO-I SAC celebrates 20 years of impact, collaboration, and growth, I find myself reflecting with immense gratitude on a journey that has shaped both my professional and personal life in ways I could never have imagined.

My ACUHO-I SAC journey began in 2009 when I attended the ACUHO-I National Housing Training Institute (NHTI) in Maryland, USA. What started as a professional development opportunity soon became the beginning of a lifelong commitment to learning, sharing, and building relationships across institutions and countries. Over the years, I have had the privilege of participating in numerous ACUHO-I

SAC initiatives, including conferences, institutes, colloquia, forums, and leadership opportunities.

The greatest gift ACUHO-I SAC has given me is not only knowledge, but people. Through this network, I have built lasting friendships and professional relationships with colleagues across Southern Africa and the United States. These connections have become an invaluable source of support, encouragement, and shared wisdom.

One of the most powerful lessons I have learned through ACUHO-I SAC is that while our institutions may differ in size, structure, and context, the challenges and opportunities we face in Residence Life and Student Communities are remarkably similar. Every interaction has expanded my understanding of student development and strengthened my belief in the importance of creating meaningful communities

where students can live, learn, and belong.

Perhaps what stands out most after all these years is the sense of community that ACUHO-I SAC has cultivated. Knowing that there is a broad network of colleagues and friends who are willing to answer questions, share resources, offer guidance, or simply listen makes our work easier and more meaningful.

As we celebrate 20 years together, I celebrate the people, the partnerships, the shared learning, and the collective commitment to student success. ACUHO-I SAC has not only contributed to my professional development—it has enriched my life.

Here's to the next chapter of collaboration, innovation, friendship, and transforming student communities together.

Twenty Years of Turning Spaces into Communities

Liyema Roji and St Mary's Hall Media Team
Rhodes University

As a member of the St Mary's Media Team, I have had the opportunity to document and share the stories, achievements, and experiences that shape our residence community. In student housing, communication is more than simply sharing information; it is about building connections, fostering a sense of belonging, and ensuring that every resident feels seen and valued. Through media, we create a platform where students can celebrate successes, engage with one another, and strengthen the spirit of community that defines St Mary's.

One of the most rewarding aspects of serving on the Media Team has been capturing moments that reflect the vibrant life within our residence. From academic achievements and leadership initiatives to cultural celebrations and community outreach projects, every story contributes to a larger narrative about who we are as a community. By sharing these experiences through photographs, videos, social media, and newsletters, we help preserve memories while also encouraging participation and engagement among residents.

Like many student communities, we have faced challenges in ensuring that all students feel represented and informed. At times, notable events and initiatives were not receiving the visibility they deserved. To address this, the

Media Team worked closely with residence leadership and student committees to create more consistent communication channels and to highlight diverse voices and perspectives within the residence.

Innovation has also played a key role in our work. By embracing digital platforms and creative storytelling methods, we have been able to reach students more effectively and encourage greater interaction. Whether through event coverage, student spotlights, or awareness campaigns, our goal has always been to create content that informs, inspires, and strengthens community bonds.

Through these experiences, we have learned that effective communication is not only about delivering messages but also about listening.

"A residence is not simply a place where students live and learn; it is a vibrant community where they discover a sense of belonging, cultivate purpose, build meaningful relationships, and develop the confidence to succeed both academically and personally."

The most impactful stories often come directly from students whose experiences, challenges, and successes deserve recognition. Their voices help shape a more inclusive and supportive

residence environment.

The impact of this work has been visible in increased student engagement, stronger participation in residence activities, and a greater sense of community pride. Students are more aware of opportunities available to them and more connected to the people and initiatives around them. Media has become a bridge that connects individuals, celebrates achievements, and reinforces shared values.

One of the most important lessons learned is that communication is a key component of student support and development. When students feel informed, represented, and connected, they are more likely to engage positively with their residence community. This matters because student housing is not simply a place to stay; it is an environment where personal growth, leadership, and lifelong relationships are developed.

Over the next five to ten years, student housing should continue prioritizing community-building, student wellbeing, and inclusive communication. As technology evolves, residences must find innovative ways to connect with students while ensuring that authentic human relationships remain at the centre of the student experience. Media teams can play a key role in supporting this vision by sharing meaningful stories, promoting engagement, and helping students feel connected to the communities they call home.



Leadership Across Two Decades

From the Chapter's early foundations to the leaders shaping its future, five voices reflect on two decades of partnership, professional growth, shared learning and the enduring work of creating places where students belong.

ACUHO-I SAC: Twenty Years of Professionalism

Norbert W. Dunkel

I was asked to write this article to capture highlights of the ACUHO-I South Africa Chapter's (SAC) past 20 years.

There were numerous South Africa housing professionals who possessed a vision for the future of campus housing in South Africa. Several of these visionaries attended the ACUHO-I Annual Conference and Exposition in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA in 2005 (Mosier, 2012). They had a chance meeting with Ms. Sallie Traxler, the ACUHO-I Executive Director, and the outcome of that meeting was incredibly important.

Subsequent to that meeting, Ms. Traxler and Dr. Jack Collins, the ACUHO-I 2004 President, were invited to attend the first Student Housing Conference in March 2006 at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa (S. Traxler, personal communication, June 15, 2026). During the meeting at Port Elizabeth, two formal processes were initiated. The first was the development of a relationship between ACUHO-I and ACUHO-I SA (would later become SAC when the chapter was officially established). The second was to identify an interim executive committee headed by Professor Roelf Visser from the University of Pretoria.

In 2008, the SAC Constitution was adopted. Also, in 2008, Eric Sobokedi attended the National Housing Training Institute (NHTI) at the University of Maryland, USA. This contact resulted in the launch of the Student Housing Training Institute in April 2011 at Stellenbosch University in South Africa.

The first ACUHO-I SAC conference would be hosted in the Sanlam Auditorium May 14 – 17, 2007 at the University of Pretoria in Pretoria, South Africa. The historic, first ACUHO-I SAC Student Housing African Summit was held in May/June 2010 at the Stias Centre of Stellenbosch in Cape Town, South Africa.

From the first years of development of the ACUHO-I SAC through to the current years, the SAC has played a pivotal role in developing and promoting institutes and conferences for the professional development of campus housing staff.

Following the death of Professor Roelf Visser in 2014, ACUHO-I and ACUHO-I SAC made the decision to name the Student Housing Training Institute the following: The ACUHO-I SAC Roelf Visser Student Housing Training Institute.



From Vision to Community: Reflections on Two Decades of Growing Student Housing Across Africa

Mark Seale

ACUHO-I SAC Former President, President Elect, Secretary | Director: Residential Services (Retired) | University of the Western Cape | South Africa

Writing this reflection feels like a full-circle moment. More than twenty years ago, I had the privilege of being one of the founders of what is now the established ACUHO-I Southern Africa Chapter (SAC). Looking back, it is incredible to see how a simple idea, shared by a group of passionate student housing professionals, has grown into such a strong and respected community.

I often think back to those early conversations. We believed Southern Africa needed a space where we could learn from one another, support each other, and strengthen the student housing profession across the region. It was never about creating another association. It was about building a community.

I often think of colleagues such as Eric Sobokedi and the late Professor Roelf Visser and Mr Marcel Rabie, and so many others who shared that vision. We believed that one day the

association would extend beyond our borders and become the African home for student housing professionals on the African continent.

Over the years, I have come to appreciate that student housing is not defined by buildings. It is defined by people, relationships and the opportunities we create for students to succeed beyond the classroom.

Perhaps the greatest lesson I have learned over the past two decades is that student housing is one of the most influential educational environments within a university. Our success should therefore never be measured solely by occupancy rates or facilities. It should be measured by the confidence students gain, the relationships they build and the communities they help create.

The next chapter will require stronger partnerships between academic and student affairs, greater collaboration across national and international higher education institutions and a willingness to rethink how we support an increasingly diverse student population. Above all, it will require us to remain committed to the belief that student housing is about people before it is about infrastructure.

The foundation has been laid; it is now for the next generation to shape the future, write the next chapter and leave an even greater legacy than the one they inherited.

Ubuntu: Reflections on Twenty Years of Connection, Care, and Community

Sallie Traxler, MBA
Past Executive Director, ACUHO-I

Reflecting on the years spent working alongside colleagues and friends across Southern Africa as Executive Director of ACUHO-I, there is overwhelming gratitude. What began as a professional responsibility became one of life's most meaningful experiences.

Between 2006 and 2013, I had the privilege of spending considerable time in South Africa. My experiences did not simply teach me new ways of working; it changed the way I think. It transformed my understanding of leadership, education, and the transfer of knowledge. Most especially, it changed the way I approach partnership to this day, with greater humility, deeper listening, and a much stronger appreciation for culture and context.

One lesson stands above all others: true partnership is not about one group teaching another. It is about learning together. It is about recognizing that knowledge exists in many

forms and that the best solutions emerge when different perspectives, experiences, cultures, and contexts are valued equally and shared freely.

That is the spirit of Ubuntu—"I am because we are." It was present in the earliest conversations that eventually led to the creation of the Southern Africa Chapter. It was present in the willingness to share ideas openly, listen deeply, and trust one another enough to build something that did not yet exist.

What followed was far greater than the creation of a professional chapter. Countless housing professionals were given opportunities to serve on training delegations, teach as faculty, participate in study tours, and build lifelong friendships across continents.

Perhaps that is the greatest legacy of the Chapter—not simply the programs that were created, but the people whose lives were changed and who, in turn, changed the lives of others. That is the enduring spirit of Ubuntu. That is the story worth celebrating.



This Is Where You Belong: Two Decades Inside ACUHO-I (Southern African Chapter)

Quintin Koetaan

Senior Student Housing Practitioner; Past President, ACUHO-I (Southern African Chapter) University of the Free State

My involvement with the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (Southern African Chapter) — ACUHO-I (SAC) — began in 2008/9, and it has since become one of the most formative threads of my professional life. What started as attendance at a conference grew, over the years, into a seat on the executive, the treasurership, the presidency-elect, and eventually the presidency itself. I reflect on this journey not for the titles it produced, but for what it taught me about the profession.

When I joined ACUHO-I (SAC) in 2008/9, I was still finding my footing in the profession. What struck me from the outset was the openness with which colleagues shared their knowledge. A practitioner who had solved a difficult problem at their own institution did not hold that solution close — they stood up and told the rest of us how they had done it. That culture of generosity shaped how I chose to practise for the rest of my career.

My tenure as Treasurer tested me in a different way. On opening the books, I discovered the Chapter was, in practical terms, virtually bankrupt. I understood quickly that this was not a problem I could solve alone — it required the buy-in of every member institution, and a shared belief that the Chapter was worth preserving. We chose financial frugality over appearances, and became far more deliberate about running in-house conferences that generated income rather than



Dissecting an Elephant Over Coffee: Five Years in Student Housing

Mr Cole de Villiers & Dr Johan Groenewald | Stellenbosch University

We often joke that student housing in South Africa is like trying to dissect an elephant: except no one agrees on where the joints are, what counts as muscle, or whether the animal is even standing still. It is large, layered, political, emotional, bureaucratic, deeply human. And it resists clean analysis. Every attempt at simplification feels quite dishonest. Over the past five years, our understanding of this "elephant" has not come from strategy documents or workshops alone, but from something far more ordinary: coffee.

A few hundreds of them. Early morning coffees after a residence crisis. Late afternoon coffees where decisions were half-made and then unmade again. Coffee meetings that began with operational logistics and somehow ended in conversations about belonging, grief, masculinity, care, and the uneasiness of institutional responsibility. Somewhere in those cups, student housing stopped being a system to manage and became a living ecology to attend to.

And so the coffees became a methodology of sorts, and deeply intentional. They created a rhythm where thinking could breathe. Where disagreement could be held without resolution. Where mentorship itself became less about guidance and more about witnessing: watching how understanding forms slowly.

Five years in, we are not closer to finishing the dissection. But we are better at noticing where it breathes.

relying on unpredictable external sponsorship. But watching the Chapter's finances steadily recover remains one of the achievements I hold with quiet pride.

One of the clearest signs of how far the Chapter had come was its growing recognition by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme and, subsequently, the Department of Higher Education, as a credible voice on student accommodation.

Above all, I hope the sector continues to hold on to what first drew me into this profession: a willingness among colleagues to share generously what they know, in service of a simple, enduring truth — that behind every policy is a student who deserves a place to belong.

Beyond Accommodation

Building Communities of Care



Retha van Rooyen
Managing Director, My Student House (Pty) Ltd | South Africa

A few years ago, one of our students started struggling. Nobody noticed at first. There was no warden walking past their room. No residence manager down the corridor. No student support office around the corner. The house was in a town I wasn't visiting that week, and by the time the situation reached me, it had already become something much bigger than it needed to be.

I remember feeling frustrated. Not with the student. Not with the staff. With the reality of what we do. We are not a university residence. So what are we going to do about it? That question has stayed with me ever since. Over the last six years, it has shaped how I think about student wellbeing, support, and what it really means to care for students when you don't own the buildings they live in and when you can't physically be everywhere at once.

For a long time, I believed that care depended on proximity. I thought support happened because people were nearby. Because there was a warden on-site. Because staff members saw students every day. Because there were systems built into a campus environment that naturally created opportunities to notice when something was wrong. And to be fair, those things matter. Over time I realised something important. Care is not created by buildings. Care is created by people and systems that are designed to notice.

When you manage accommodation across multiple towns and cities, you quickly learn that you cannot rely on chance encounters in hallways or someone happening to see a student having a bad day. Which means you have to build intentional care instead. You have to design it. You have to ask yourself difficult questions. Who notices when a student starts withdrawing? Who follows up when a complaint sounds different from the others? Who checks in when something feels off? And perhaps most importantly, who takes responsibility for making sure nobody falls through the cracks?

One of the realities of managing student accommodation is that efficiency matters. The challenge is not choosing between efficiency and care. The challenge is building systems where efficiency helps you care better. Where technology helps you notice. Where processes help you respond faster. Where information helps you identify problems before they become crises. The goal is never to replace human connection. The goal is to make sure human connection happens consistently.

The biggest lesson I've learned is surprisingly simple. Care is not a building, and it is not one person standing on-site. Care is a system designed to notice. The goal was never to become a university residence. The goal was to ensure that students living outside traditional residences still had access to meaningful support. Reliable support. Consistent support. Support that doesn't depend on luck.

The real question is whether a student in difficulty would actually be noticed and helped when they need it most. If the answer is no, then good intentions don't matter very much.

Across Southern Africa, more and more students are being accommodated outside traditional campus residences. That means we need wellbeing models that can travel. Models that do not rely on a single building. Models that do not depend on a warden walking down a corridor. Models that can support students wherever they happen to live. The way we reach them may look different, but the care they receive should never be less.

Belonging in Residence Life

Reimagining Student Wellbeing Through Connection, Care and Community

Bes Liebenberg
Head: Student Support (Wellbeing) and Leadership Development | Department of Residence Affairs & Accommodation | University of Pretoria

Residence life is often viewed as accommodation infrastructure: a place where students sleep, study and transition into university life. Yet for many students, particularly in a diverse and unequal society such as South Africa, residence spaces become something far more significant. They are places where identity is negotiated, where loneliness and connection coexist, and where young people begin to ask one of the most important questions of their university journey: "Do I belong here?"

At the University of Pretoria, student wellbeing in residences is increasingly being reimagined through a human-centred approach that recognises belonging as foundational to student success. Wellbeing cannot be separated

from connection, care and community. In environments where students feel seen, heard and valued, they are more likely to thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

This shift has encouraged the development of collaborative wellbeing practices within residence communities that move beyond traditional support models. Student leaders, peer support structures and professional staff work together to create emotionally supportive cultures that promote inclusion, dignity and shared responsibility. These approaches recognise that belonging is not created through policy alone, but through everyday human interactions: listening, mentoring, supporting and building trust across difference.

At the same time, growing mental health challenges among students have highlighted the importance of creating compassionate institutional cultures where care is intentional and accessible. Leadership development

initiatives and peer wellbeing programmes in residences are increasingly equipping students not only to lead administratively, but to lead with empathy, emotional intelligence and social awareness.

Belonging, therefore, is not an abstract concept. It is experienced in the daily moments that shape student life: being welcomed into community, finding support during difficulty, having one's identity affirmed and knowing that one matters.

As universities continue to rethink the future of student wellbeing, residence spaces hold unique potential to become communities of care where students do not simply live, but learn, lead and flourish together. In this context, belonging is not an added feature of the student experience; it is the foundation upon which wellbeing, leadership and student success are built.

At the National Table

ACUHO-I SAC Helping Shape South Africa's Response to Gender-Based Violence

Jay Pillay
President, ACUHO-I SAC

"Safe campuses begin with safe residences. Student housing professionals are not simply service providers—they are essential partners in preventing Gender-Based Violence and supporting student success."

On 30 June 2026, ACUHO-I SAC proudly took its place at one of the country's most important higher education policy platforms when I represented the Association at the Post School Education and Training (PSET) Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Technical Task Team (TTT) meeting, convened by Higher Health on behalf of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). For ACUHO-I SAC, our presence signified more than attendance, it represented the growing recognition that student housing professionals have an essential role to play in creating safe, inclusive and supportive learning environments.

One of the highlights of the meeting was the continued recognition of ACUHO-I SAC as an official Community of Practice with Observer Status on the Technical Task Team. This acknowledgement reflects the increasing importance of residence life within higher education policy and affirms what our members experience every day: student residences are central to student wellbeing and institutional safety. Residence professionals are often among the first people students turn to following incidents of harassment, abuse or violence. Their ability to respond compassionately, provide appropriate referrals and create supportive living communities makes them indispensable partners in institutional responses to Gender-Based Violence.

A major focus of the meeting was the review of the Draft Protocol on Managing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Cases on Campus (July 2026). The protocol seeks to establish a consistent, survivor-centred framework that all institutions within the Post School Education and Training sector can adopt. The protocol represents another important step towards ensuring that every institution responds to Gender-Based Violence consistently, compassionately and effectively.

Student residences are much more than accommodation. They are communities where students live, study, socialise and develop lifelong relationships. They are also spaces where students may first disclose experiences of violence or seek assistance.

The collective message was clear: combating Gender-Based Violence requires collaboration, accountability and sustained commitment from every stakeholder. It confirms that residence life is no longer viewed solely as an operational function, but as a strategic contributor to student wellbeing, institutional safety and national transformation.



A Good Crisis Not to Be Wasted Reimagining Universities' Sustainability

by Phillip Chibvuri – Finance Specialist

In my previous In Touch contribution, I explored the concept of “the hunter becoming the hunted” in South Africa's student accommodation sector. The central argument was that the landscape had shifted fundamentally, demanding a different way of thinking about university accommodation and its future. Today, that shift has become even more pronounced. What we are witnessing is not a sudden crisis but the culmination of pressures that have quietly intensified over the past decade. Declining government funding, rapid massification of higher education, escalating operating costs, ageing infrastructure, increasing compliance requirements, and the widening affordability gap among students have converged into what can only be described as the perfect storm. Yet every crisis presents a choice.

Institutions can continue responding incrementally to individual problems, or they can recognise this moment for what it truly is: an opportunity to fundamentally reimagine the sustainability of higher education. The conversation can no longer revolve solely around budgets, funding allocations or annual deficits. Those are symptoms. The deeper discussion must be about sustainability, resilience and the operational models that will define the future of universities.

The uncomfortable reality is that the current funding model, particularly for student accommodation operations, is becoming increasingly unsustainable. Universities are expected to deliver quality accommodation, maintain ageing facilities, invest in new infrastructure, respond to growing student expectations and remain affordable—all while traditional revenue sources continue to experience significant pressure. These expectations are not inherently unreasonable. Students deserve safe, affordable and conducive living environments that support academic success. However, institutions are equally constrained by economic realities that cannot simply be wished away. Balancing affordability, quality and financial sustainability has become one of the defining leadership challenges of our time.

Leaders must be willing to facilitate conversations that move beyond headlines and political rhetoric towards evidence-based solutions. The sector has spent considerable time describing the funding challenge. The next chapter must focus on solving it. That solution will not emerge from funding alone. It will require institutions to rethink commercial strategies, optimise operational efficiency, embrace technology, diversify revenue streams and strengthen partnerships with government and industry. Equally important, universities must adopt robust cost containment and cost avoidance strategies without compromising the quality of the student experience. This is where collaboration becomes essential.

The relationship between society, universities and business currently lacks the alignment required to address these interconnected challenges. Each stakeholder recognises the pressures, yet their responses often remain fragmented. Sustainable solutions will only emerge when these sectors collectively redefine their shared responsibilities and long-term objectives. Technology will undoubtedly play a central role. Digital platforms, smart facilities management, predictive maintenance, data-driven planning and integrated operational systems offer opportunities to improve efficiency while enhancing service delivery.

The future of higher education will not be determined by the size of its funding, but by the agility of its leadership.



Student Residence Safety, Governance, and Efficiency in Management

Simphiwe Dumsani Ntuli
Residence Manager | Mangosuthu University of Technology

Student residence management is a critical pillar of student success and institutional stability. This contribution reflects on the importance of integrating safety, effective governance, and operational efficiency in student housing. Drawing from years of experience in student accommodation environments, the focus is on how structured systems, policy alignment, and strategic leadership can create safe, accountable, and well-managed residences that support both academic performance and student wellbeing.

One of the most defining moments in student housing management has been addressing the recurring challenges of safety and security within residences. Incidents related to unauthorized access, theft, and lack of accountability exposed serious gaps in governance structures. In response, a comprehensive safety strategy was introduced, including controlled access systems, CCTV surveillance, and strengthened on-site security personnel. These measures not only reduced incidents but also restored confidence among students and stakeholders.

Governance also required significant attention. Residence committees initially operated without clear policy guidance, leading to inconsistencies and sometimes conflicts of interest. By formalizing governance frameworks—through induction workshops, clear role definitions, and ethical standards—student leaders were empowered to act responsibly and transparently. This alignment strengthened accountability and improved collaboration between students, housing management, and institutional leadership.

Efficiency in management became a natural outcome of these improvements. Digitization of allocation processes, structured communication systems, and performance monitoring tools enhanced service delivery. The reduction in administrative delays and improved responsiveness ensured that students received timely support, while management could make informed decisions using reliable data. Another important lesson emerged from leadership development initiatives within residences. Training student leaders not only improved governance but also fostered a culture of responsibility and peer accountability. Residences began to function as developmental spaces rather than merely accommodation facilities.

A key insight is that student housing must be approached as a holistic system. Safety without governance creates control without accountability, while governance without efficiency leads to bureaucratic delays. The balance of these three elements is essential for sustainable student housing management.

Going forward, student housing must embrace innovation, policy development, and continuous leadership training. The next decade should focus on smart security technologies, data-driven decision-making, and inclusive governance models that reflect student diversity.

Safe, well-governed, and efficiently managed student residences are not just living spaces—they are foundations for student success and institutional excellence.

Don't Wait to Bring Software Home

Dr Yusuf M Motara
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Residence Head: Winchester House | Rhodes University

Student housing creates student communities; and if an institution is fortunate indeed, those student communities develop deep roots and begin to propagate some of the values that the host institution would want its graduates to take on. The development of “good” communities—however that may be defined—is neither spontaneous nor assured. Time, effort, support, and institutional will are some of the factors that turn good communities into great ones, or (at least) prevent vices from taking root. But what is to be done when the people supporting these communities are forced to spend their time on administrative work rather than enabling growth and sustaining initiatives?

But what if those very administrators—and other such employees—were able to reduce their administrative workload by, say, 40-50%?

At Rhodes University, a mobile-friendly web-based system is now being piloted which specifically addresses the experience of administrators and processes on the ground. It is initially aimed at replacing the current paper-form-based way for events to be scheduled, which presently involves a great deal of running back-and-forth for signatures and approvals, after which administrators have to manually check and address event details that may not conform to university processes, deadlines and rules.

The system as implemented removes much of this overhead. Approvals, rejections, and even queries are online. Purchase orders, permissions, and confirmation of responsibilities are all catered for. The (sometimes complex) rules of the university are encoded in the online event application process itself, which means that administrators no longer need to perform certain checks: the system does it for them. Administrators and stakeholders can see the event progress change in real-time, with no page-reloads required, and email notifications are sent to all concerned.

It is certain that some other universities will have similar systems. They may want to nevertheless take note of this system, because the cost of development was not hundreds of thousands of rands, nor did it require a year-long plan and committee-led design. No contract with an external party was signed. All of this software was developed—from conception to pilot—in less than three months, on a minimal budget, by one computer scientist who is at the coalface of the residence system.

Student housing is not simply about providing buildings: it is about providing services. For the first time in student housing history, it is possible to streamline and automate parts of these services at a low cost, in-house, depending on local expertise, with very little risk. Why wait for it to be provided from above, when you can build it yourself?



Co-Creation as Ownership

A perspective on Living-Learning that fosters social cohesion

Dr Charmaine January
Residence Development Manager | University of Cape Town (UCT)

Historically, student housing in Southern Africa was largely understood through a physical lens: beds, buildings, and basic services. Over time — gradually, unevenly, but unmistakably — a different understanding has taken hold: that a residence is first and foremost a learning environment and as such the question arises how can it function optimally as part of a university's learning ecosystem. It grew from the convergence of institutional vision, scholarly discourse, and — most significantly — the persistent, honest voices of students themselves. This article reflects on what it has taken to move from managing spaces to cultivating communities, and why the principle of co-creation lies at the heart of that journey.

The most enduring insight from my years in Residence Life is deceptively simple: students engage with what they have helped to create. Top-down programming is faster, tidier, and easier to evaluate. It is also persistently ineffective at building the kind of belonging that transforms a student's experience of university.

When we began constructing UCT's Living and Learning Framework — a structured approach to co-curricular programming in residences — although we started with a review of the literature on student affairs practice, we did not stop at theory. The process was genuinely consultative: student leaders were not informants but co-architects, shaping what the framework would become before it had a name. What we heard was consistent, and it was the students who said it most clearly: they needed academic scaffolding far more than additional social events; they needed to feel that someone in the building knew their name; and they needed leadership roles that felt meaningful, not performative.

The framework that emerged from this process rests on three pillars: academic support, social belonging, and career readiness. What is new — and what I believe represents a genuine contribution to Southern African student housing practice — is the way we have woven them together across the academic year, responsive to the rhythms of student life rather than imposed upon them.

A co-curriculum is not a calendar of disconnected events. It is a coherent programme in which each activity has a purpose, each purpose connects to the broader framework, and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. House committees who understand this design principle produce programmes their residents actually attend — not because attendance is compelled, but because relevance is felt.

The team is learning with students how we can shift from event management to co-curricular design and to identify and overcome the challenges required from us to invest differently — in capacity, not just content. It is recognised that this shift cannot be driven from the centre but that it must be co-generated through consultation with students — in annual training sessions, in sub-warden training, discussed at wardens' retreats, and in formal feedback processes that give students a genuine role in shaping what residence life could become.

More significantly, students in residences shaped by co-creation principles more readily seek help — from tutors, from sub-wardens, from the Residence Life team — and that willingness to ask is, in my view, one of the most important outcomes a residence can cultivate.

The next decade in Southern African student housing will demand more from us, not less. Against all of this, the temptation will be to add more: more services, more programmes, more platforms.

I would argue for a different orientation: depth over breadth. Fewer, better-designed interventions that students have helped to shape. Investment in the human beings — sub-wardens, mentors, tutors, and house committee members — who make residence communities function at a relational level. They ask of us that we see students not as recipients of residence services, but as protagonists in an unfolding community of learning. A sustained commitment to listening remains non-negotiable, not as a preliminary step to programming, but as a practice that never concludes.



The Convergence Moment

Why Higher Education Leaders Must Diagnose Before They Decide

David Hibbler, Jr., Ph.D.
Creative Strategist. Thoughtful Steward. I align people, systems, and spaces to build environments where equity lives, leadership grows, and communities thrive.

Leading through overlapping pressure requires more than speed. It requires systems thinking, context, and disciplined judgment. Higher education leaders are not facing a shortage of problems. They are facing a shortage of simple problems. The housing shortage is not just housing. The protest is not just speech. The facilities concern is not just operations. The student concern is not just an individual student issue. Each one sits inside a larger system of expectations, resources, policies, relationships, institutional history, public scrutiny, and trust. The emerging reality for higher education is not one disruption at a time. It is convergence. Political scrutiny, student well-being concerns, workforce fatigue, enrollment volatility, affordability pressure, aging facilities, construction costs, insurance challenges, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, public trust concerns, global conflict, immigration uncertainty, compliance demands, and climate disruption are not arriving in separate lanes. They are interacting, compounding, and creating conditions where the visible issue is often only the beginning of the story. The leadership challenge is no longer simply responding quickly. It is diagnosing accurately. The leaders who will serve institutions well in this environment will not be the ones who react fastest to every signal. They will be the ones who can understand the system behind the signal.

Today's challenges are rarely contained within one department, one policy, or one decision-maker. The challenge is not simply that leaders have more issues to manage. The challenge is that the issues are connected. The work is no longer just solving the problem in front of you. The work is understanding the system producing the problem.

In complex environments, the presenting issue is often only the surface layer. The mistake leaders can make is assuming the first description of the problem is the full problem. The better leadership question is not only, "What happened?" It is, "What conditions produced this?" Leaders do not need perfect information before acting. But they do need enough understanding to avoid treating symptoms as solutions. The goal is not slower leadership. The goal is better leadership.

One useful way to understand this environment is through the framework of VUCA: volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. But VUCA helps leaders move from frustration to diagnosis. It helps answer a more useful question: What kind of difficult are we facing? Not every urgent situation requires the same response. Some moments require action. Some require listening. Some require coordination. Some require restraint. The discipline is knowing which environment you are actually in before choosing the leadership move.

This is why leadership cannot rely on simple replication. Best practices matter. But best practices are not universal solutions. They must be translated through context. The better question is, "What does disciplined leadership require in our environment?" Context is not a complication to work around. Context is part of the diagnosis.

Leaders are not outside the systems they are trying to manage. Pressure changes the decision-maker. When demand exceeds capacity, leaders can become reactive. Judgment narrows. Patience decreases. Communication becomes rushed. Decisions become focused on immediate relief rather than long-term effectiveness. The goal is not to eliminate stress. The goal is to notice when stress begins shaping decisions. A centered leader is not a passive leader. A centered leader is a more disciplined leader. That pause creates space between pressure and reaction. And in complex environments, that space matters.

Higher education has always evolved through disruption. The current moment is no different. Disruption alone does not create improvement. Sometimes it only creates exhaustion. Redesign requires intentional leadership. The strongest leaders will not be the ones who eliminate complexity. Complexity is not going away. They will be the ones who can interpret complexity before acting, diagnose the system behind the signal, and lead through convergence with clarity, context, and discipline. The work is not to remove uncertainty. The work is to build the capacity to lead through it.

FROM EMPOWERMENT TO IMPACT

Reflecting on WiHS 2026 at the University of Mpumalanga

Bes Liebenberg
Symposium Coordinator

There are some conferences that leave you with a notebook full of notes. And then there are gatherings that leave you with something more, a renewed sense of purpose, new relationships, and a reminder of why the work we do matters.

The 2026 ACUHO-I SAC Women in Housing Symposium (WiHS), hosted by the University of Mpumalanga (UMP) in Mbombela, was one of those gatherings.

Held under the theme “From Empowerment to Impact: Women Transforming Housing Systems,” the Symposium created space for women in student housing to connect, reflect, learn and challenge one another to think beyond their individual roles and consider the difference they can make within the systems they serve.

But WiHS 2026 was about more than a theme. It was about people.

Women from across the South African student housing sector came together from 14 institutions and organisations, sharing experiences that were often different in context but remarkably similar in substance. As one delegate reflected, “We all have the same challenges as Housing Practitioners.”

That sense of shared experience became one of the defining features of the Symposium.

University of Mpumalanga: More Than a Host

The University of Mpumalanga was not simply the venue for WiHS 2026. UMP became part of the story of the Symposium.

For many delegates, this was an opportunity to experience a relatively young university that is making its mark in the higher education landscape. The warmth and hospitality of the UMP Local Organising Committee were evident throughout the programme. Their commitment, energy and attention to delegates helped create an environment in which people felt welcomed and connected.

The UMP team demonstrated something that is sometimes easy to forget in professional events: hospitality is not an administrative function—it is part of the experience.

From the first welcome to the final moments of the Symposium, there was a genuine sense of ubuntu, connection and pride. Delegates repeatedly commented on the warmth of their hosts and the quality of the experience.

In many ways, UMP provided the perfect setting for the conversations WiHS sought to create: a place where people could step away from the demands of their everyday environments, look at their work differently and imagine what might be possible.

From Empowerment to Impact

The theme of WiHS challenged delegates to move beyond empowerment as an end in itself.

It is important to encourage women to believe in themselves, to develop their leadership capabilities and to recognise their potential. But empowerment becomes truly meaningful when it translates into action—when confidence becomes contribution, when influence becomes opportunity for others, and when leadership improves the systems and communities we serve.

Several conversations returned to this idea.

Delegates spoke about self-care, purpose, courage, mentorship, resilience and the responsibility that comes with leadership. One particularly powerful reflection was:

“Use power to influence positively, help others grow and don't gatekeep opportunities.”

That sentiment captures much of what WiHS represents. Leadership is not simply about advancing oneself. It is also about creating space for others to grow.

Another delegate captured the personal side of leadership beautifully: “Always fill your cup before you pour onto others.”

For women working in environments that are demanding, complex and often people-intensive, this is an important reminder. We cannot continually give without also making space to restore, reflect and care for ourselves.

The Power of Connection

Perhaps the greatest strength of WiHS is its ability to create connection.

The Symposium provided opportunities for established professionals, emerging leaders and colleagues at different stages of their careers to learn from one another. The conversations extended beyond formal presentations and into corridors, meals, excursions and informal moments of sharing.

There was encouragement for younger women to step forward, with one delegate reminding us: “Never say you are too young or not ready to lead.”

That is an important message for the future of our profession.



If women are to transform housing systems, we need to create pathways for emerging colleagues to participate, contribute and eventually lead. We need to share knowledge rather than protect it. We need to celebrate one another's successes and create opportunities for others to succeed.

And perhaps most importantly, we need to continue building a professional community where women do not have to navigate the challenges of housing leadership alone.

Looking Forward

The real measure of WiHS 2026 will not be what happened during those few days in Mbombela. It will be what happens afterwards.

Will conversations continue? Will relationships develop into collaborations? Will someone mentor a younger colleague? Will a delegate return to her institution and introduce a new idea? Will someone who doubted her own readiness decide to step forward?

These are the small moments through which transformation happens.

One delegate expressed the spirit of the Symposium particularly well:

“We will only be able to build a better future if ordinary women continue to do extraordinary things.”

Perhaps that is the lasting message of WiHS 2026.

At the University of Mpumalanga, women came together not only to be inspired, but to inspire one another. Not only to speak about leadership, but to consider what leadership can change. Not only to celebrate where we have come from, but to think about where we can go next.

The journey from empowerment to impact is not a single step. It is a commitment to keep learning, keep connecting, keep lifting others and keep finding ways to leave our institutions and our profession better than we found them.

From Mbombela, the conversation now moves forward.

When Betting Becomes a Student Success Issue

As online gambling becomes increasingly accessible to university students, higher education is being challenged to recognise gambling-related harm as a wellbeing, financial and academic-success concern — and to respond before the damage escalates.



Article based on a report by Jay Pillay

The South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals (SAASSAP) recently convened a national symposium on Gambling, Student Wellbeing and Student Success in Higher Education to address the growing impact of gambling, particularly online gambling, on university students. The symposium brought together senior higher education leaders, student affairs practitioners, government representatives, regulators, student organisations, mental health professionals, financial aid practitioners and sport administrators to examine the risks associated with gambling and to explore coordinated responses across the sector.

The message emerging from the gathering was clear: gambling is no longer merely a financial issue. It has become a critical student success concern, with significant implications for academic performance, student wellbeing, mental health, financial stability, retention and graduation outcomes. Students are particularly vulnerable to the rapidly expanding 24-hour online betting environment, where access through smartphones, aggressive digital advertising, personalised betting promotions, social media influencers and in-play sports betting have made gambling increasingly visible and constantly available.

Dr Nomusa Dube-Ncube, Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training, described student gambling as a growing national concern. The symposium highlighted links between frequent gambling and declining academic performance, absenteeism, student disengagement and financial distress. Gambling-related financial stress can affect attendance and classroom participation, while student allowances and financial aid resources may be diverted towards gambling activities. Financial insecurity can, in turn, increase vulnerability to gambling-related harm, particularly where gambling is promoted as a quick solution to financial challenges.

The risks extend beyond money. Mental health practitioners highlighted the relationship between gambling addiction and psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, social isolation, stress and burnout, substance misuse, suicidal ideation and self-harm. Participants stressed that gambling should not be viewed in isolation, but as part of a broader ecosystem of behavioural and mental health risks affecting young adults. There was broad agreement that it should be addressed alongside other student wellbeing risks such as substance abuse, mental health challenges and food insecurity.

For universities, this creates a strong case for prevention and early intervention. The symposium emphasised the importance of financial literacy programmes, budgeting support initiatives, early identification of financially vulnerable students and stronger student financial wellness interventions. Institutions were also encouraged to incorporate gambling screening into wellness services, train counsellors on gambling-related interventions and develop referral pathways to specialist addiction support services. Digital literacy and online risk awareness were identified as equally important components of student education and prevention programmes.

Student housing has a particularly important role to play. Residence environments are often the primary setting in which behavioural risks, wellbeing concerns and financial challenges become visible. Residence staff and student leaders may be among the first to notice changes in behaviour, isolation, financial difficulty or other warning signs. This makes it important to integrate gambling awareness into residence education programmes, equip residence teams to identify early warning signs and strengthen referral pathways between housing staff, counselling services and other student support structures.

The symposium also raised questions about the increasing presence of gambling companies within university and national sporting environments. While participants recognised the financial benefits that sponsorships may bring to sport development, concerns were raised about the visibility of gambling brands among students, the normalisation of betting behaviour and potential conflicts between student wellbeing objectives and commercial interests. Further discussion was called for around responsible sponsorship frameworks and institutional guidelines that place student wellbeing at the centre of decision-making.

The event concluded with strong support for ongoing collaboration and the establishment of a national community of practice focused on Gambling, Student Wellbeing and Student Success. The challenge now is to move from awareness to coordinated action. Safeguarding students from gambling-related harm is not solely a regulatory responsibility. It is a shared commitment across the higher education sector, requiring research, financial education, prevention, early identification, appropriate support and sustained collaboration. For residence life professionals in particular, the opportunity lies in recognising the signs early and ensuring that students are connected to help before a hidden problem becomes a crisis.

