

Explanatory note

Position Statement

Purpose-built student accommodation

This explanatory note provides an overview of the Position Statement for Purpose-built student accommodation

1 INTRODUCTION

The Position Statement Purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) provides interim guidance to support the delivery of multi-storey purpose-built student accommodation while longer-term amendments to the State planning framework are investigated.

1.1 Why has the policy been prepared?

The Position Statement Purpose-built student accommodation has been prepared to support Western Australia's growing reputation as a destination for international students. Student numbers in WA are expected to almost double by 2030, so having a clear and straightforward approval process is becoming increasingly important.

Until now, the lack of clear planning guidance for multi-storey PBSA has led to mixed assessment outcomes, some lower-quality proposals, and delays for providers. The Position Statement helps address those issues by setting clear expectations for design quality and

assessment to improve consistency and timeliness, making it easier to deliver student accommodation that supports the State's education and housing goals.

The Position Statement outlines design guidance for high-quality student living environments and key planning considerations, including campus access, integration with surrounding areas, transport management and building functionality.

1.2 What about other co-living accommodation types?

A longer-term approach to co-living is being considered by the WAPC. Co-living includes Aged Persons Accommodation (APA), Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA), and other shared-living formats.

Feedback from consultation generally supported taking a more integrated approach to shared-living, as long as the specific operational needs of different groups are still met. How these various accommodation types might be brought together will be explored further as part of a future review of the R-Codes.

1.3 How will Specialist Disability Accommodation be considered?

There was clear feedback about the need for more immediate guidance for Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA).

Given current NDIS funding pressures and uncertainty among some local governments about how the R-Codes apply, the WAPC will provide targeted interim guidance.

This will help clarify assessment pathways, support delivery in response to NDIS demand, and assist local governments when assessing SDA proposals under the RCodes.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE NEW PBSA POLICY

2.1 What types of student accommodation does this position statement apply to?

Student accommodation can take lots of different forms, from standalone houses and small grouped dwellings to large multi-storey buildings. In this position statement, the focus is on the more complex, multi-storey purpose-built developments that need clear guidance around shared amenities, how they fit into their urban surroundings, connections to transport and services, and how they're managed day-to-day.

2.2 Why has a new definition of PBSA been provided?

The Position Statement recognises that, because there hasn't been a dedicated land-use category for purpose-built student accommodation, proposals have often been assessed under a mix of definitions, like "Residential Building" or "use not listed". To reduce confusion, an interim land-use definition for PBSA has now been introduced. This gives developers, operators and tertiary institutions much more certainty about how proposals will be considered.

The new definition, based on the City of Perth's recently approved Amendment 41, helps clearly separate purpose-built student accommodation from other housing types. Where applicable, local planning schemes should consider the inclusion of this land-use definition to create a consistent term for assessments

across the State. While this interim definition is a short-term fix to support more immediate housing delivery, a broader look at how PBSA fits alongside other co-living models will form part of future policy work.

2.3 Do the R-Codes apply to purpose-built student accommodation?

The R-Codes apply to dwellings and buildings designed for permanent occupants, so they don't work well for multi-storey purpose-built student accommodation. PBSA typically accommodates students on a temporary basis and are designed around shared spaces, rather than self-contained accommodation. Because of this, the majority of multistorey PBSA doesn't fit within the R-Codes "multiple dwelling" definition.

The Position Statement explains how its policy measures apply to multi-storey PBSA, whether it's on or off-campus, where it falls outside of the 'multiple dwelling' definition. Other forms of development, such as detached or grouped dwellings, will still be assessed under the built form controls of the R-Codes. In these lower density student accommodation developments, it would be up to the discretion of the decisionmaker to apply provisions outlined in the Position Statement.

2.4 What local planning requirements apply?

It is important to note that the Position Statement isn't intended to stand on its own. While it provides the main guidance for multi-storey PBSA design and management, proposals still need to be assessed within the broader local planning framework, including relevant Local Planning Schemes and Local Planning Policies for the site.

2.5 Why is an outcomes-based approach proposed?

Feedback from stakeholders made it clear that the policy needed to strike a better balance between providing certainty and allowing flexibility in how developments are delivered.

In response, the Position Statement has adopted an outcomes-based approach, aligned with the design principles of State Planning Policy 7.0 (Design of the Built Environment). While the draft version advertised in 2025 included assessment criteria to guide decision-making, the table was often read as a set of prescriptive requirements. The revised approach allows proponents to show how they meet the outcomes through innovative design and management solutions. This provides greater flexibility while still ensuring clear, measurable outcomes for design quality and student wellbeing.

It is also important to recognise that the use of the outcomes is intended to be flexible and proportionate. Depending on the size and scale of the development, not all outcomes will be required for every proposal.

2.6 What other matters need to be considered?

The Position Statement does not outline the health and building requirements for PBSA proposals. Other matters such as public health lodging house requirements, fire safety, building classifications and construction standards, will be addressed through existing legislation.