National Codes Annual Report

to The Department of Communities and Local Government

2017

NATIONAL CODE
assured accommodation

Having been appointed Chair of the Committee of Management at the end of 2016, I am delighted to be introducing this summary of the *Annual Report* for the first time. The report details the on-going work of the Codes and their importance.

2016 - 2017 was a busy period, reflecting the continued growth of the purpose-built student accommodation sector (PBSA). Although the number of providers within membership of the Codes increased only slightly, the number of developments being operated by that membership increased substantially. At the same time the substantial "churn" in respect of the operational management of developments within the sector was evident. Such factors necessarily resulted in a greater number of verification visits being undertaken than had been the case previously. Equally, efforts to rationalise the governance structures and improve the operation of the verification system have added to the overall workloads of those running the Codes.

The aim of this document is to provide all interested parties with a quick snap-shot of the work undertaken in respect of the Codes during 2016 - 2017. To assist readers locate the section/s that they are interested in, the relevant page numbers in the main report are given in brackets next to each section heading within this summary.

My thanks to all those individuals and organisations which participate within the operations of the two Codes, help run them, and verify that developments comply with standards that they set. The sector's reputation with all its stakeholders rests on how effective such self-regulation is, and I am grateful for everyone's collaboration.

Stephen Battersby
Chair
ANUK/Unipol Codes Committee of Management

Membership Report 2016-2017 (pages 5-11)

**Fig 1 Number of Bed Spaces Covered by the ANUK/Unipol Codes 2005 (1) to 2017 (13)**

Bed Spaces in the National Codes 2005 - 2017
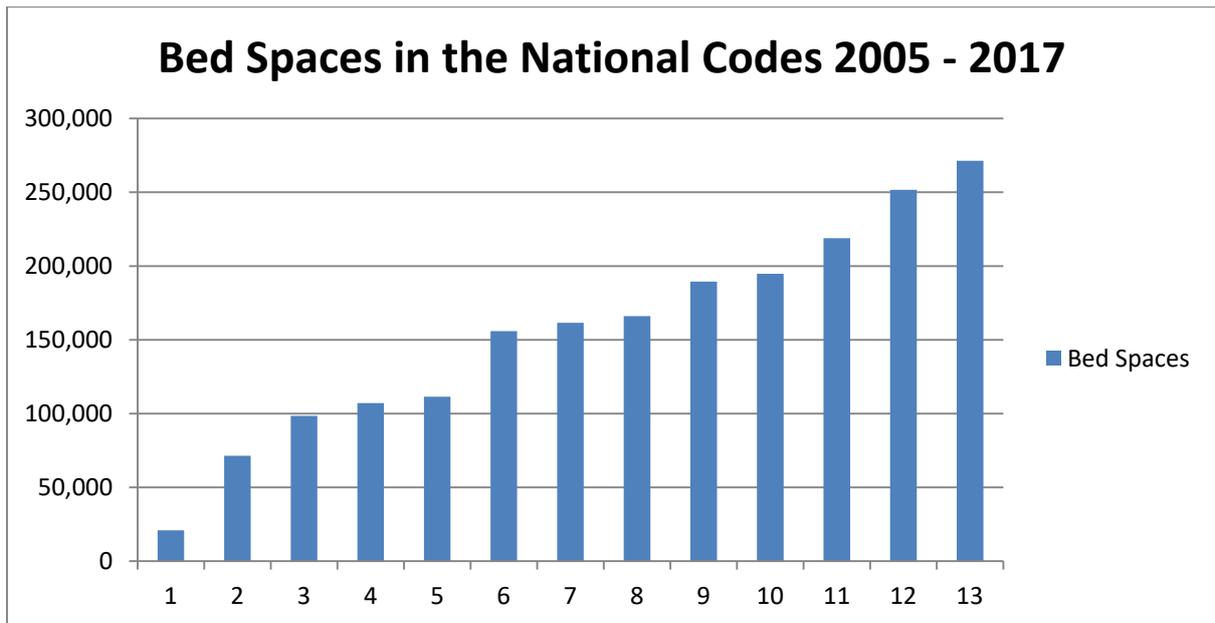
As of the end of June 2017 the total number of bed spaces accredited under the two Codes was 271,402. This was an 8% increase on the numbers reported in 2016.

The overall membership of both Codes stood at 157. A total of 47 of these were members of the Code for Educational Establishments, whilst the remaining 110 were members of the Code for Non-Educational Establishments. The vast majority of the accredited bed spaces were within the latter Code, as they have been since the two Codes were first in existence in 2006 (see Fig 2)

Fig 2   Comparative Bed Space Coverage by Code - 2006 (1) to 2017 (12)
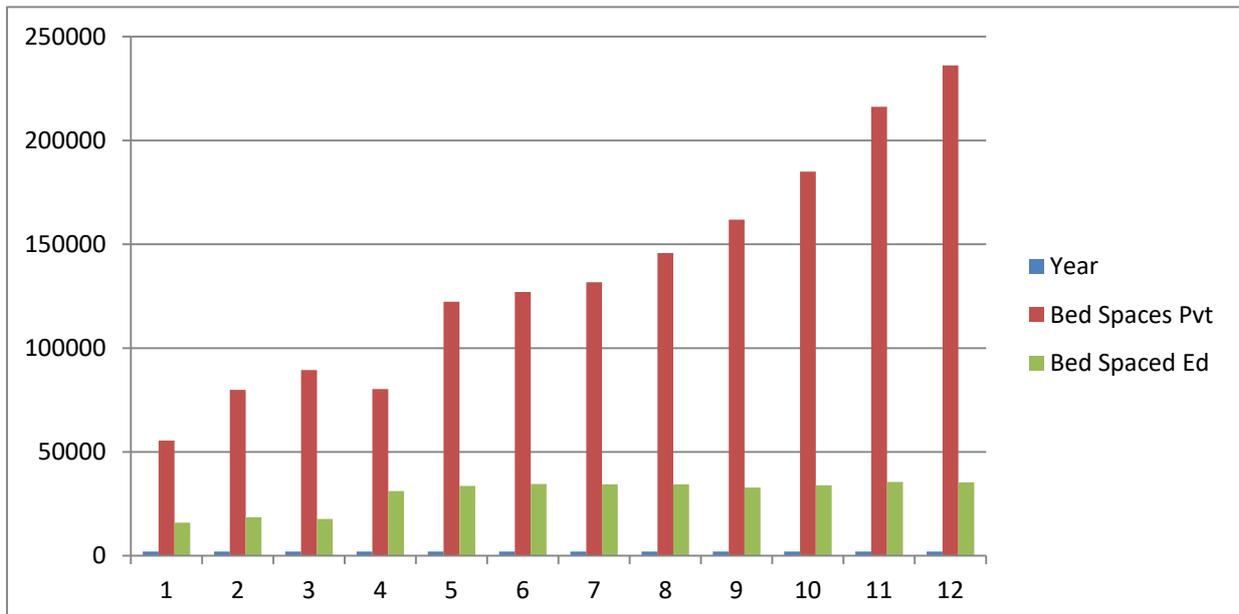
The Codes accredit developments located in 86 different places around the United Kingdom, with most concentrated in cities situated in the north and midlands of England which have more than one university.

Fig 3   Top Ten Locations of Accredited Bed Spaces Under the ANUK/Unipol Codes

Bed Spaces
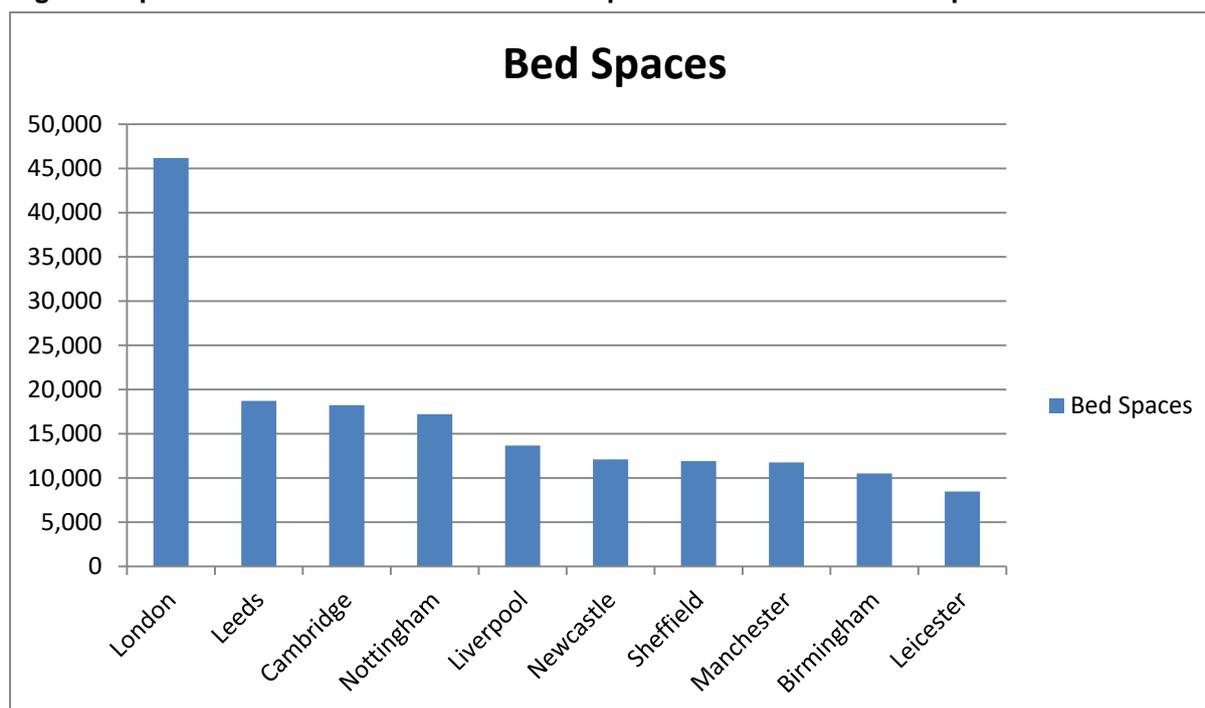
The enormous growth over recent years of available purpose-built student accommodation in London is reflected very clearly in Fig 3, making it more than twice as large as any other UK city. Cambridge appears in third in the list mainly due to the fact that all 31 colleges are members of the Code for Educational Establishments, although the city does also have a small number of developments operated by commercial providers.

Governance of the Codes (pages 12-15)
The Committee of Management (CoM), which oversees the day to day operations of the ANUK/Unipol Codes, underwent some changes during 2016 - 2017. A total of fifteen members left but another fifteen people joined, including someone appointed to the newly created post of Vice Chair.

The CoM met on two occasions in that period - November 10th and March 6th - and attendance at both meetings was higher than the previous average for such meetings.

The Codes are also governed through a body known as the Consortium, which consists of representatives of the three organisations who originally devised the Codes - The Accreditation Network UK (ANUK); The National Union of Students; and Unipol Student Homes. The Consortium met twice during 2016 - 2017 (once by telephone and once face to face), but it also agreed some action that members should be taken with regard to fire safety in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire.

Joint Codes Conference Report (pages 16-19)
The Joint Codes Conferences (encompassing all three of the Government Approved Codes) continues to be popular with members, with the most recent one - the 7th - attracting 120 delegates and speakers. The main focus of the event was, as always, on issues that are thought to be of most interest to those responsible for the day-to-day management of accredited developments, albeit with at least one session that deals with what can best be described as a 'big picture' issue.

On the basis of a comparison of evaluations from delegates who have attended the last six Joint Codes Conferences, the event has consistently been rated as either 'Excellent' or 'very good' (based on a numerical scoring system whereby 1 equals 'excellent'; 2 equals 'very good'; 3 equals 'good'; 4 equals 'average' and 5 equals 'poor'), both in terms of the venue, location, food and presentations.

Fig 4   Average Evaluation Ratings for Aspects of the Last Six Joint Codes Conference
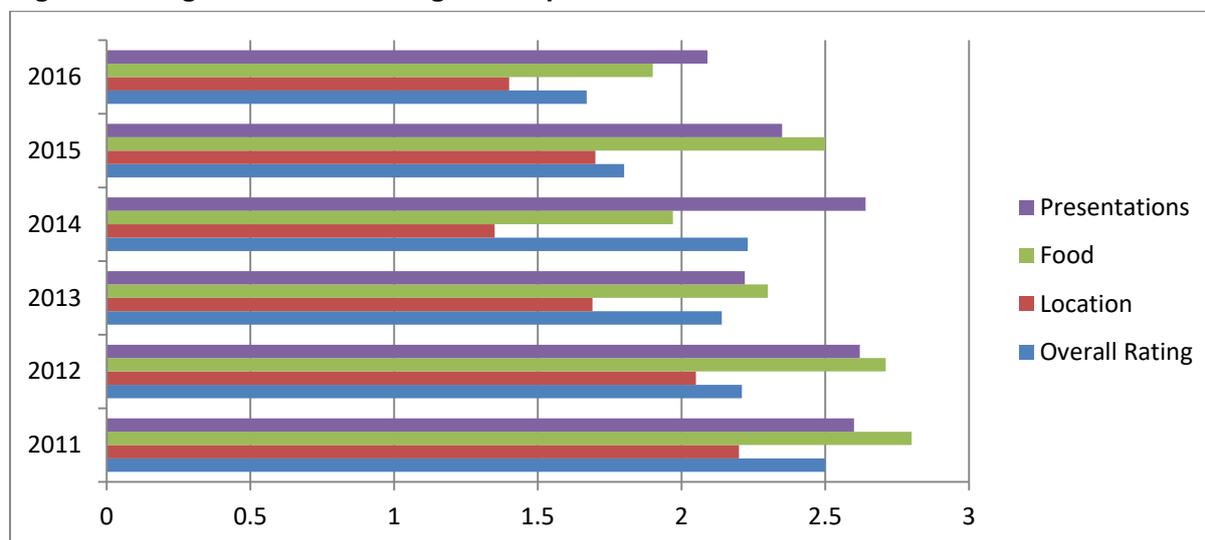
The shorter the line the better received the aspect was. The findings for the 7th Joint Codes Conference (2016) are that all of the given headings were rated better than any of the previous Joint Code Conferences, a result that it may prove very difficult to better at the next one, scheduled to take place in November 2017.

Meeting the Challenges of the Eleventh Year (pages 20-24)
Eight specific challenges were set by the 2016 Annual Report to be completed within the 2016 - 2017 period. These were as follows:

- Completion of a new database for the Codes giving the buildings accredited, the number of bed spaces operated, details of the people responsible for day to day management and moving to a paperless system for verification reports and responses;
- Standardising the approach taken by verifiers during the course of undertaking visits - based on best practice identified from observing such visits - as well as the content of the reports and the ways in which they are accessed online;
- Identifying ways of continuing to raise the profile of the Codes, both amongst members as well as students and their parents;
- Completion of the review of the online training course;
- Ensuring that the online Self-Assessment Questionnaires for both Codes are relevant to the content of those Codes and that any errors or typos have been eradicated;
- Completion of new SAQs for all members of the Codes who last completed one in 2013 and 2014;
- Starting the process of reviewing the content of the Code for Educational Establishments, with the aim of implementing the revised Code from September 1st 2018;

- Implementing a review of the design and content of the website, with a target launch date of January 2018.

In addition to the above mentioned challenges, the following activities were undertaken:

- Production of a late and refurbished buildings protocol;
- Implementation of a programme of visits to all newly built developments before they could be accredited;
- Lobbying of Government requesting the exemption of purpose-built student accommodation providers (who were members of the relevant approved Code) from mandatory HMO licensing.

Assessment and Verification Procedures (pages 25-35)

The 2016 - 2017 period was a very busy one for the teams that undertake the verification visits, who between them completed 158 - the highest number so far undertaken in any one operating year (as can be seen from Fig 5).

Fig 5   Number of Verifications Completed Year on Year - 2008 - 2009 to 2016 - 2017
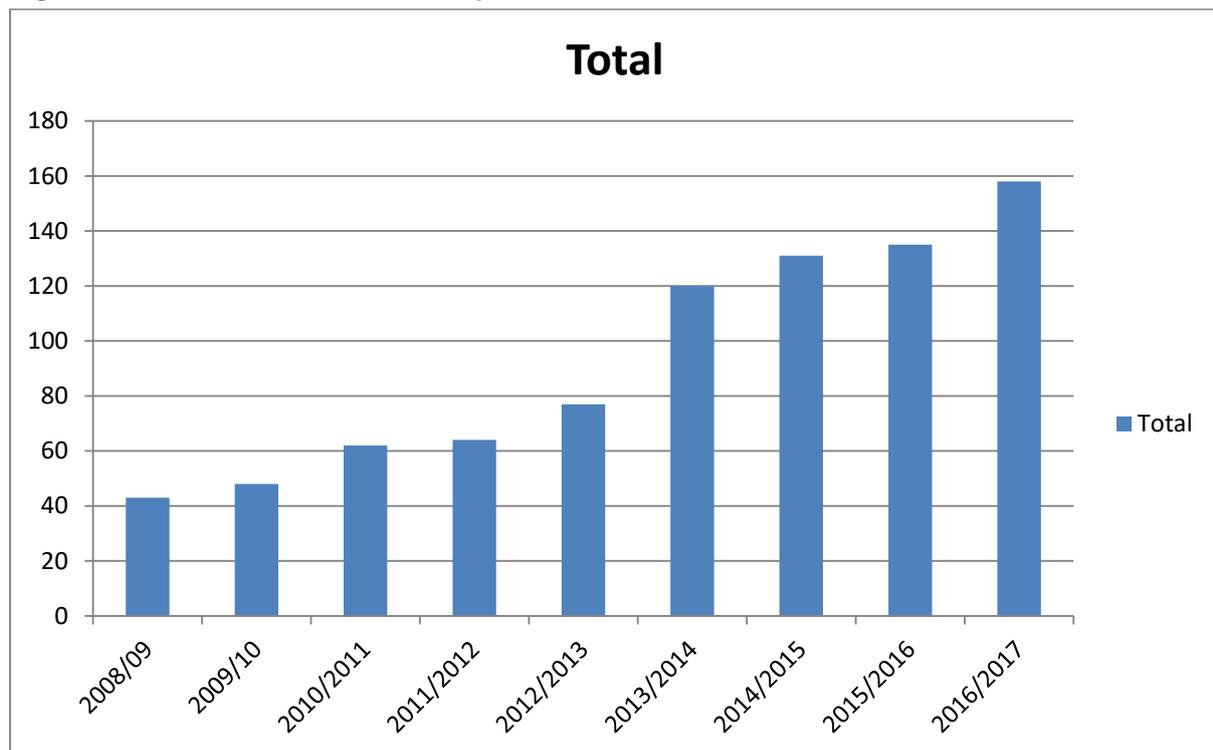
The main reason why so many visits needed to be undertaken was due to the number of changes of operational management which occurred during 2016 - 2017, but also because all of the 31 Cambridge Colleges were due their three yearly verification visit during that same period.

In terms of the outcomes arising from the visits that have been undertaken, Fig 6 compares the findings from 2015 - 2016 with those for 2016 - 2017 in terms of the number of Action Points identified during the course of the visits undertaken.

Fig 6   Outcomes from Visits Completed in Both 2016 - 2017 and 2015 - 20/16 in Terms of the Number of Action Points Identified.
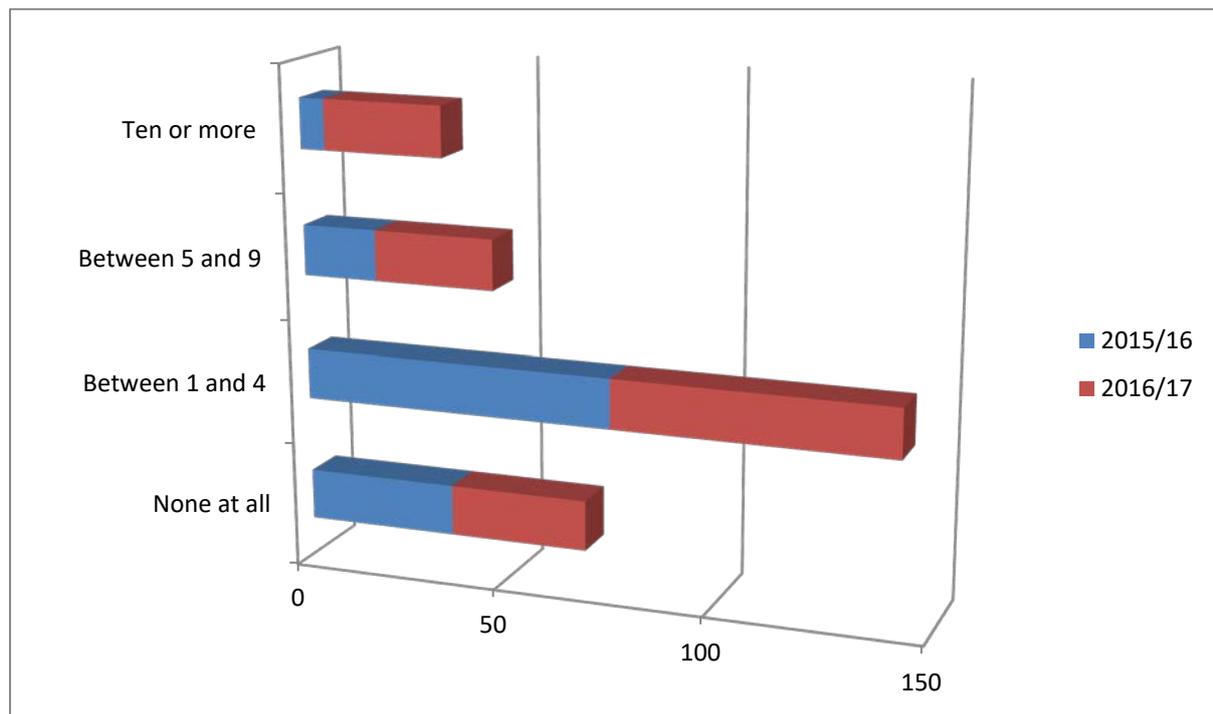

Whilst the number of visits that identified either no action points or between one and four actions was roughly similar in the two periods, the substantial increase in visits completed in 2016 - 2017 at which higher numbers of action points were being reported is very evident from Fig 6.

Complaints and Tribunal Procedures (pages 36-40)
The number of complaint contacts received by the National Codes in 2016 was the highest it has ever been, confirming a clear upward trend since 2013. However, it is also noticeable that although the number of contacts has risen, there has not been a subsequent growth in complaints that progress to either the 'formal' stage OR which are escalated for the attention of the Tribunal (see Fig 7).

The Number of Code complaint contacts that were received in the first half of 2017 (to the end of June) was 45, so greater than the whole of 2013 or 2014 but not as high as 2015 and 2016, and if the pattern of previous years continues then the final tally of complaint contacts for 2017 is likely to be around the same as it was in 2016. This may also be true in relation to the number of formal complaints that need to be processed in 2017; to the end of June a total of eight had been designated as such, slightly less than half of the total of 19 that were recorded for the whole of 2016. However, at the halfway point of 2017 just one of the complaints had been referred to the Tribunal, although more were expected to require such action later in the year.

Fig 7   Number of Complaint Contacts Received Year on Year, the Number Which Become Formal Complaints and the Number Referred to the Tribunal
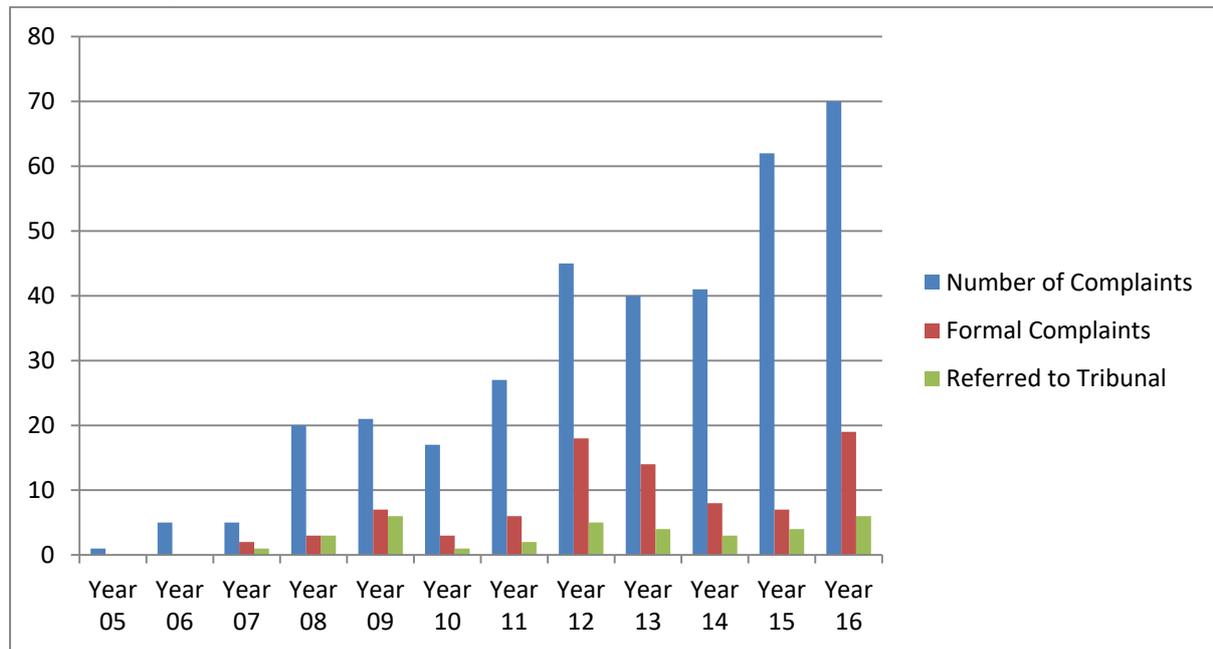

Website Visits and Online Training Course (pages 41-42)

The findings shown in Fig 8 reveal that whilst usage of the site in terms of page views, visits and visitors increased steadily between when the site was first launched in 2011 - 2012 and 2015 - 2016, the was a very pronounced decrease in all of these during the 2016 - 2017 period.
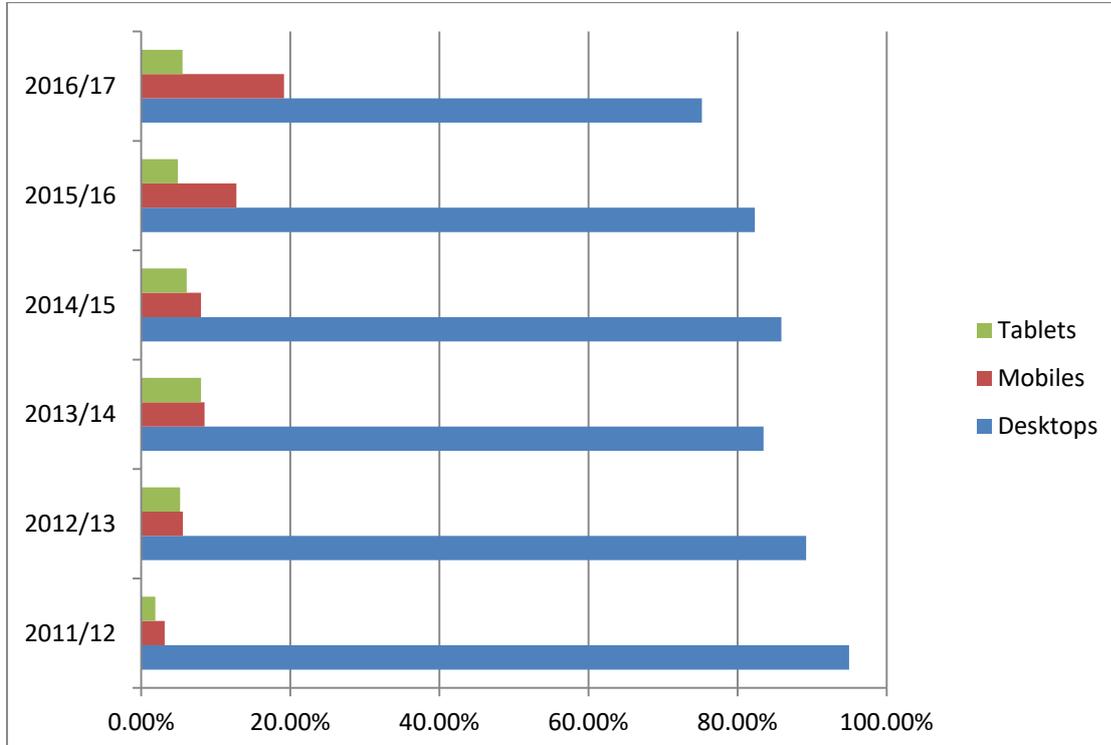
As it is also possible to ascertain what type of devices visitors access the website from, one gets a sense of the degree to which students themselves have made use of the site. Fig 9 details the percentage of visitors who accessed the site using a desktop, a mobile phone or tablet; given that students are more likely to use the latter two devices, the indications are that they are now beginning to make more use of the site than they have done before.

The above finding might be supported by the fact that the website page detailing how students can make a complaint has entered the list of the top ten pages viewed (see fig 10)
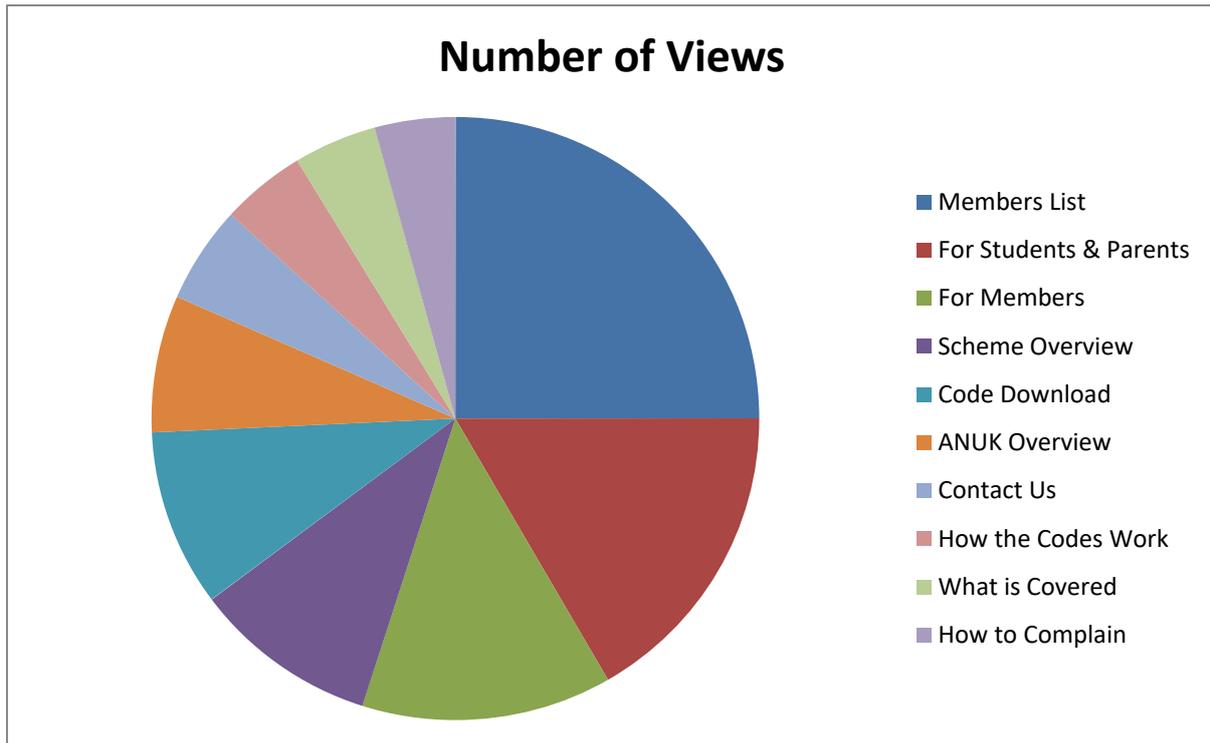
Fig 8   Number of Visits, Visitors and Page Views 2011 - 2012 to 2016 - 2017
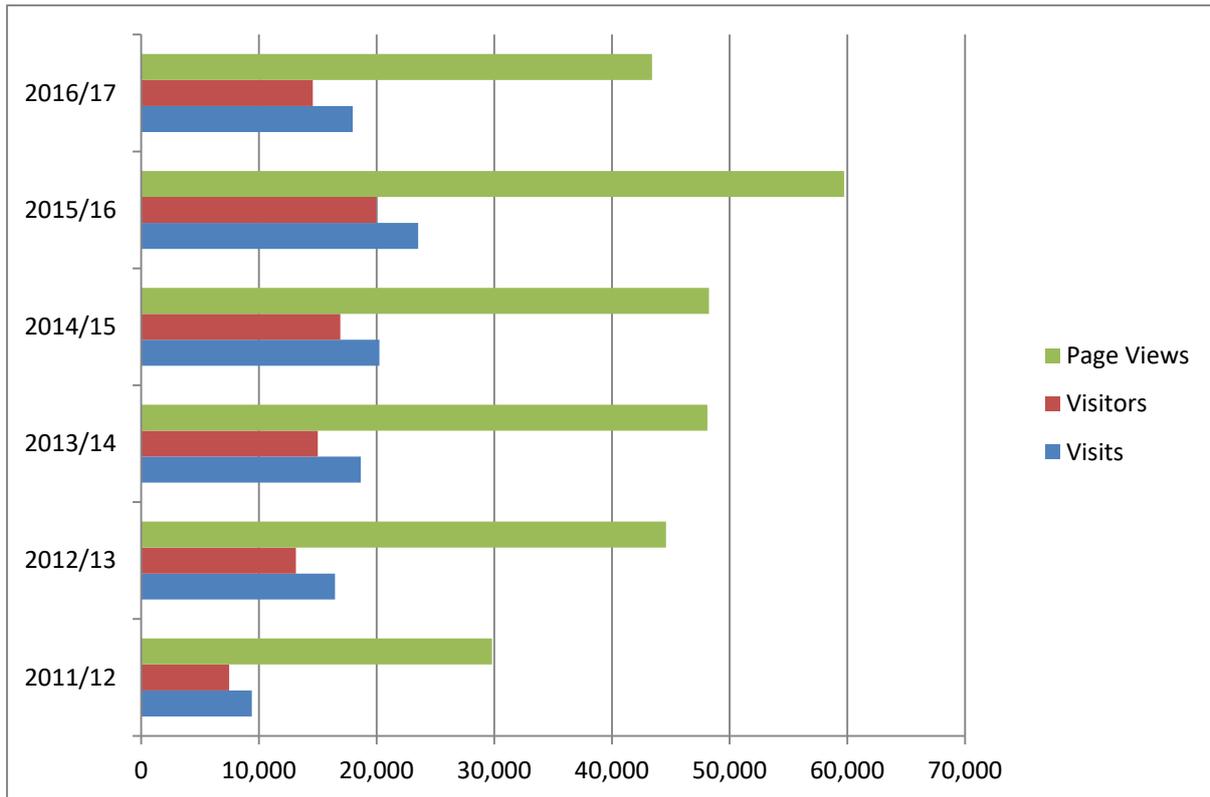
Fig 9   Percentage of Visitors Accessing the Site via Desktops, Mobile Phones and Tablets

Fig 10 Top Ten Pages Viewed

Number of Views

Legend:
- Members List
- For Students & Parents
- For Members
- Scheme Overview
- Code Download
- ANUK Overview
- Contact Us
- How the Codes Work
- What is Covered
- How to Complain

Conclusion (page 43-44)

The report concludes by listing thirteen challenges for the twelfth year of operations (2017 - 2018);

- Implement a protocol for use by Code members who manage developments for third parties;
- Provide guidance on fire safety risk assessments for members with high rise developments;
- Identify on a database the number of high rise buildings and type of cladding system used
- Instigate a review of the content and suitability of the existing management test;
- Implement a feasible Fit and Proper person test;
- Consider the possibility of including a five yearly HHSRS inspection within the verification procedures;
- Discuss the addition of a clause within the Deposits section of the Code that requires members who protect deposits to do so within a given period of time;
- Complete the review of the Code for Educational Establishments;
- Complete the redesign of the website in early 2018;
- Finalise the changes to the draft verification report template and implement reforms to the online system which allow verifiers greater access to historical material;
- Identify ways of continuing to raise the profile of the Codes, both amongst members as well as students, parents and politicians, with a specific emphasis on the use of social media;
- Ensure that updated SAQs have been received from all existing members of the Codes;
- Prepare revised versions of the Codes declaration forms in time to begin the process of asking providers to sign-up for the next three year membership period (2018-2020) and also amend the property schedule so that it allows for the collection of additional data about developments, such as the number of storeys.