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From shipping news to uni students' mews

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URBAN AFFAIRS

THE idea of solving the shortage of accommodation for university students by stacking them in boxes may not appeal to some, but it is about to become a reality at one Canberra campus. The Australian National University is the first to use prefabricated apartments, built in shipping containers and stacked like Lego, as an alternative form of housing. Relatively cheap and compact, the apartments differ from ramshackle sharehouses or college halls by offering private, studio-style accommodation on campus. "It's quite cute really," said Rachel Hewes, 21, an arts-law student, who will move into one of the 22-square-metre boxes early next year, after living in college. "You get everything you need in one small area for a decent rent without needing to find a

roommate or having the cost of a single-bedroom apartment." The *Herald* reported on Tuesday that developers were racing to create the first private apartment blocks using prefabricated "boxes" from China, but the ANU development will be the first of its kind. The university said it was a quick way to tackle the student accommodation crisis affecting most institutions, and meet the evolving needs of students. "The students ... are changing," said the director of accommodation at ANU, Marie Wensing. "A lot of students ... have never shared a bathroom. When you're in the halls ... sharing with 15 others it's a bit of a culture shock." The apartments have been popular with postgraduate and international students, she said, who wanted more sophisticated

accommodation and privacy. Ms Wensing said other universities had expressed interest. But the shift towards prefabricated accommodation on and off campus could compromise jobs and building standards, says the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. "A trend towards prefabricated products is robbing Australians of skilled jobs and condemning young people to work in places such as fast-food restaurants instead of learning a trade," said the union's state secretary, Andrew Ferguson. The 70 boxes, supplied by QuickSmart Homes and built by Hutchinson Builders, are stacked six storeys high and connected by corridors and stairwells like other apartments. A builder, Mario Hadjia, said the project would



Lego land ... 70 shipping containers become campus accommodation.



Small but perfectly formed ... ANU students, from left, Kelly Burgess, Daniel Wang and Holly Johnson inspect one of the 22-square-metre accommodation boxes. Photo: Sam R. Coates

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