

Student Social Spaces at LSE

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Introduction

At the Students' Union (SU) we are aware that space is a premium on campus. Holborn is a vibrant area to be situated within and with Covent Garden on our doorstep there is plenty of restaurants, bars and cafes for students to socialise in. However, there are not many non-commercial places for students to socialise in, whether it is just to eat lunch or have a quick chat in between study sessions there is not really anywhere on campus to do this without being required to spend money.

The SU's existing qualitative feedback from students, from both the SU Annual Surveys and from the Education Covenant Report, supports this position; they show a strong demand for more non-commercial spaces on campus. Spaces such as the Saw Swee Hock Building, the existing Student Salon, the PhD Academy and the Postgraduate Common Room are cited as good examples. Further, while postgraduate students have existing spaces allocated to them on campus, at present there is no equivalent space for undergraduates. Therefore the SU resolved to investigate student views on social/study spaces on campus and to gather more quantitative (as well as qualitative data) on how the space on campus could be better utilised.

The following report sets out the findings from the Student Social Space Survey

Methodology

Fieldwork took place from 14 January to 22 January 2018; this was carried out through an online survey which was promoted via:

- A stall outside the Saw Swee Hock Building;
- The LSESU newsletter;
- Sports and Societies Facebook groups; and generally through
- LSESU social media channels.

Students were asked a total of 10 questions; they were required to input their LSE email as a mandatory question. The first 5 questions were to gather basic demographic information and the remaining questions probed students on issues surrounding social and informal study spaces. The final question asked students directly if they thought an undergraduate student salon should be set up.

Responses

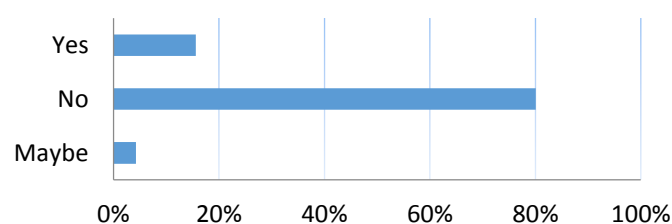
A total of 256 responses were received from students; 58% of these were from undergraduate students, 39% were from postgraduate taught students and the remaining 3% of responses were from PhD and General Course students. There were a broad range of responses from students with different student statuses; 33% of respondents were Home students; 39% were non-EU international and finally 28% were EU students.

There was also a broad range of responses from different Departments, although one student chose to skip this question. The Departments of Government and Economics respectively had the highest number of respondents and Methodology and Social Psychology had the lowest number.

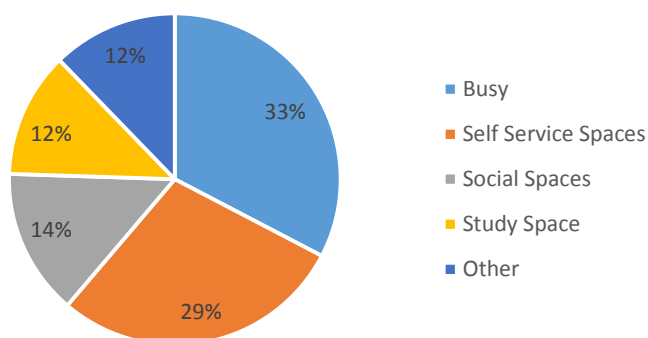
What is your Department?	No.
Department of Accounting	8
Department of Anthropology	14
Department of Economic History	6
Department of Economics	26
Department of Finance	3
Department of Geography and Environment	16
Department of Government	29
Department of International Development	11
Department of International History	17
Department of International Relations	13
Department of Law	18
Department of Management	19
Department of Mathematics	9
Department of Media and Communications	3
Department of Methodology	2
Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method	15
Department of Social Policy	14
Department of Social Psychology	2
Department of Sociology	12
Department of Statistics	6
European Institute	5
Gender Institute	4
Institute of Public Affairs	3
Total	255

Findings

Do you think there are enough non-commercial social spaces on campus?



Students were firstly asked their views on whether they believed there were enough non-commercial social spaces on campus. Commercial spaces were defined as including include coffee shops, cafes and bars etc. In total 80% of respondents stated “No” to this question, with a further 4% stating ‘Maybe’.

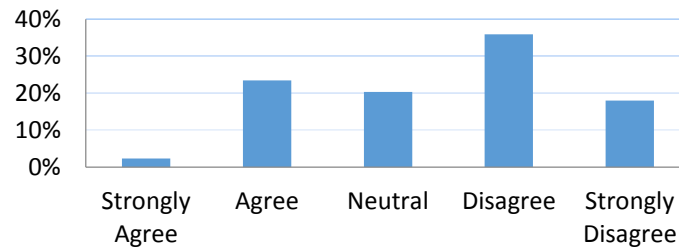


The above pie chart shows the breakdown of the different types of comments left by students to the question of non-commercial spaces on campus. In total, 76% of the comments left by students stated that they wanted either social or self-service spaces that were not directly linked to purchasing food or drink. What came across strongly in the comments is that there is a demand for a warm, inside space where students can simply prepare and/or eat their own food on campus.

These comments can be grouped into five categories:

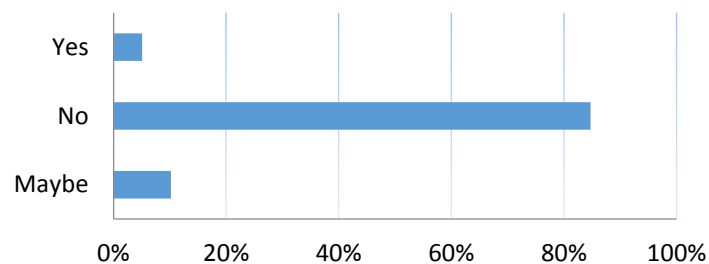
- *Busy* – These students stated that they valued the existing non-commercial spaces and facilities, but thought that they are too busy at peak times or that the opening hours were not long enough. Half of comments specifically mentioned the Saw Swee Hock Building.
- *Self Service Spaces* – These were students that stated that they wanted more self-service facilities to be able to eat their own food on campus such as more microwaves, hot taps and coffee machines.
- *Social Spaces* – These were students who directly commented that they felt there were little to none non-commercial social spaces on LSE’s campus but did not directly reference these spaces as a place to eat.
- *Study Spaces* – These were students that felt that study space should be prioritised over social spaces.
- *Other* – These were comments that could not be categorised.

LSE's current facilities enables me to bring in food from home?

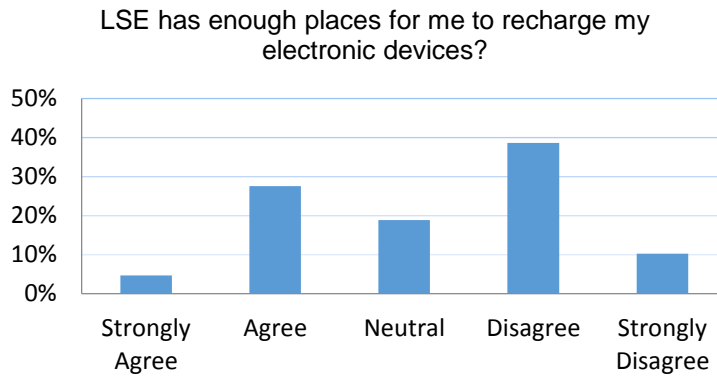


The issue of spaces to eat and a lack of microwaves also came across strongly in the responses to the above question. In total, 54% of students stated that they either 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree' that LSE's current facilities enable them to bring food in. All of the comments left by students either mention microwaves (including cleanliness and queues for them) and/or a strong sense that there are few indoor, warm spaces to eat food on campus (outside of the SU and the Student Salon). Interestingly, there were a significant proportion of comments demonstrating a demand for access to hot water via a kettle or a hot water tap. Further there was a suggestion that some students require a halal or vegetarian only microwave.

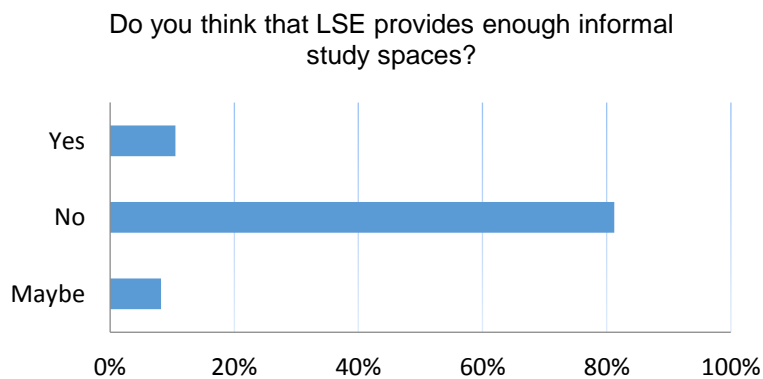
Do you think there are enough microwaves on campus?



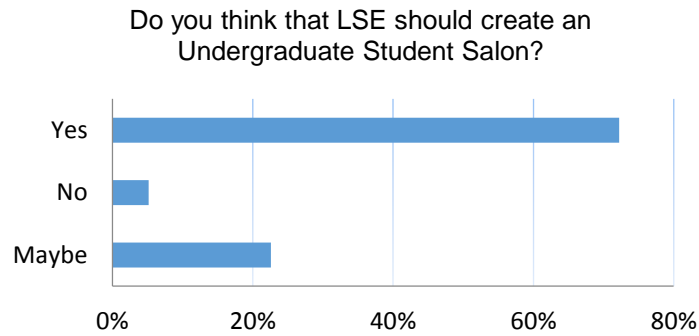
Students were then directly asked their view on whether there were enough microwaves on campus and an overwhelming 85% of students stated 'No'. What is clear in the response to this question is that there is a considerable demand by students for access to more microwaves. This data presents an opportunity for the School to increase student satisfaction simply through increasing its provision of microwaves (including by opening an undergraduate common room).



Only 32% of students stated that they either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' to the above question, with only 5% of students stating that they 'Strongly Agree'. From the comments left by students it was strongly felt that there were little to no plug points outside of the main section of the library, especially in the escape section of the library and in the Saw Swee Hock Building. Students felt that this could limit the spaces they could find to study in outside the library. Some students also complained that many plug sockets in and outside of the library often do not work.



The issue of a lack of study spaces outside of the library was further explored in the above question where 81% of students stated that they did not feel that there were enough informal study spaces outside of the library. Interestingly, a third of comments left by respondents stated that they actually desired better access to silent study spaces rather than informal study spaces. This suggests that students at LSE required a broad range of study spaces and that if more informal study spaces were created outside of the library, this could free up silent study space in the library. Some students also stated that they felt alternative study spaces may exist but cited a lack of awareness around where these were.



At present there is designated space for postgraduate students (PhD Academy and PG common room) but there is no equivalent space for undergraduate students, therefore the Students' Union sought to see if there is demand for this among the student body. Overall, 72% of all respondents stated that they thought LSE should create an Undergraduate Student Salon. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of the responses for 'No' and 'Maybe' were from non-undergraduate students. However, only 10% of postgraduate respondents actively stated that they did not think an undergraduate common room should be created.

From the comments left by students to this question, 43% were supportive of creating an undergraduate common room, with many students leaving suggestions for what it should contain. However, 35% of comments were from postgraduate students who stated they would be unhappy if the new student salon was for undergraduates only. Interestingly, a further 17% of comments stated that they would like to see the current Student Salon refurbished and upgraded.

Conclusion and Recommendations

What came across clearly in the responses to this survey is that there is a strong student demand for non-commercial social and informal study spaces at LSE. The period of fieldwork was shorter than most SU research and neither were the full resources of the SU deployed, therefore the high level of responses was unexpected. The SU believes that there is a saliency on this issue among the student body at LSE. While the completion of the Centre Buildings and Paul Marshall projects may go some way to alleviate this issue, the School should also seek to improve spaces for students while the works are ongoing.

The results clearly show that students want self-service facilities such as microwaves and hot taps so that they are able to bring food from home; the demand for more microwaves in particular was considerable. Interestingly the survey also revealed that students at LSE feel there is nowhere for them to eat their lunch, given that the majority of the LSE term time takes place during the winter months this is concerning. The creation of more spaces for students to be able to eat food and socialise without the pressure of purchasing products is something that should be prioritised by the School.

As undergraduates currently have no 'designated' common room on campus, the Students' Union asks the School to consider introducing this onto campus as one means of increasing non-commercial student space. However, this is not the end of the conversation, even within existing spaces the use of these are in flux, therefore for the School needs to ensure that this provision is maintained both for the short and longer term. As well as seeking to upgrade existing facilities, for example the Student Salon should be refurbished and the space within it could be utilised better.

In light of the responses of students to this survey the Students' Union has developed a set of principles for the School to follow to address the issue of non-commercial space on campus. These principles are:

1. To create and open an undergraduate common room for academic year 2018/19 on campus which includes microwaves and a hot tap facilities.
2. To review existing common rooms (including the Student Salon) and to refurbish and upgrade these spaces (including introducing USB sockets).
3. To ensure that the current level of non-commercial student space on campus is maintained in the longer term and that this space is expanded upon and not reduced, including:
 - a. Existing spaces are safeguarded in long term space plans;
 - b. That any non-commercial student spaces in the new developments are seen as additions and not replacements for existing student spaces.
4. The School to map out and review what other spaces on campus could be utilised as non-commercial spaces for students.
5. That when space plans are being developed either through refurbishment or large capital developments the School actively considers whether there is availability for non-commercial social spaces in that development.



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