



Your Hall Your Call 2014

Overview

This paper provides an evaluation of the findings from the 2014 Your Hall Your Call research project carried out by LSE Students' Union. The purpose of Your Hall Your Call is to consider the overall quality of student experience in LSE Halls of Residence. In preparation for this paper we visited 11 of LSE Halls of Residence and carried out an online survey with students living in LSE Halls.

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Background and Methodology

Between 10th and the 21st of March 2014 LSESU conducted the annual 'Your Hall, Your Call' research project. This project is one of the biggest consultations of students in university accommodation undertaken by Students' Unions in the UK.

In order to gather student opinions on their university provided accommodating the LSESU Community and Welfare Officer and LSESU staff members visited 11 of LSE's halls of residences. In addition to this a 19-question survey was electronically sent to all students living in LSE Halls.

The halls visited were:

- Bankside House
- High Holborn
- Urbanest King's Cross
- Northumberland House
- Rosebery Hall
- Carr-Saunders Hall
- Passfield Hall
- Butler's Wharf Residence
- Grosvenor House
- Lilian Knowles House
- Sidney Webb House

Overall 147 filled out the questionnaire or by participated in one of the focus groups held in halls. The student body consulted consists of both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The main findings of the consultation are presented in the following pages, broken up in ten categories, which cover various the aspects of the university accommodation experience. The consultation revealed that many of the issues raised in previous years have been adequately addressed, and overall satisfaction levels have risen, which exemplifies the important role 'Your Hall, Your Call' plays in illuminating students views and building a better accommodation experience.

Issues explored through this year's research included maintenance and refurbishment, provision of IT facilities, transparency of hall pricing and the social activities that are provided by halls committees. At the end of this report we have made 14 recommendations and we look forward to working with the LSE residences team to deliver these changes that will further enhance and improve the experience of LSE students living in halls.

Maintenance

Contrary to previous years, the majority of LSE students are satisfied with the maintenance of their halls, the information and updates about the repairs and their timing. Despite certain issues that keep arising, many students across different halls commented on the satisfactory state of the halls.

The halls that reported the biggest problem with maintenance and upkeep were Grosvenor House, High Holborn and Passfield Hall. Another recurring theme that arose across a number of halls was the length of time it took for repairs to commence and be completed once a fault had been reported.

Bankside House: Students appear satisfied with the level of maintenance works and the emails they receive detailing the work that is taking place. However, on more than one occasion students were not notified very late that specific works would be taking place.

Butler's Wharf Residence: Residents commented positively on the information and regular updates regarding maintenance works. Students appear satisfied with the speed their complaints are being catered for and the responsiveness of the staff. The main issues revolved around the length of time maintenance work took and the disruption it caused.

Carr-Saunders House: Students praised the timely notifications they received, regardless of regular postponements of the actual works.

Grosvenor House: The quality of maintenance in Grosvenor House appears to be subpar, with repairs usually significantly delayed even after several notifications on behalf of the residents.

High Holborn Residence: There is widespread dissatisfaction around issues of maintenance and cleanliness of the residence. One of the most common issues that students faced is disrepair. Additionally, many students commented that sanitary bins are never emptied without them asking and that the state of toilets is far from ideal with a number of residents complained that blocked toilets are left unattended for a long time.

Lilian Knowles House: Maintenance works occasionally drag for a prolonged period of time causing disruptions to the residents. What's more, a number of students complained about the difficulty of obtaining information about the timing of planned maintenance works.

Northumberland House: Residents highlighted the frequent replacement of shower heads and the general sound condition of Northumberland House.

Passfield Hall: Although residents commended staff for their speedy response, there is a number of reoccurring problems with the toilets and bathrooms. First of all, the water coming from most showers is not hot, but lukewarm. Also, sewage water often leaks and the ventilation in most toilets is permanently broken. Finally, the repair of the broken vending machine took much longer than expected.

Roseberry Hall: In general, residents seem very satisfied with the maintenance in RH regarding both the response speed and the range of available information. The only negative comment received was students reporting that the over/hobs can break frequently.

Sidney Webb House: Satisfaction levels are not low at SWH, but minor issues seem to arise frequently. The kitchen heater has not been fixed in a long time despite several complaints; a water leak from the 5th floor has been left unattended; and there are certain concerns regarding the kitchen and windows cleanliness.

Urbanest King's Cross: By and large students seem satisfied with the state of the halls. The only issue raised was the poor upkeep of the external building (e.g. cleanliness of windows).

Refurbishments

Satisfaction levels regarding the state of refurbishments vary significantly among different halls of residence, with some performing excellently, and others showing room for improvement. Overall, most students commented positively on the sound communication of the refurbishments. The basic sources of dissatisfaction are: the size of beds, the age of particular halls, the dilapidated state of some furnishings and the timing of refurbishments.

Bankside House: Residents at BH were quite satisfied, although students stressed the need to update the kitchens and replace the pool tables at the bar.

Butler's Wharf Residence: Students at BWR appear mostly satisfied with the refurbishments. However every student commented that they felt refurbishments can often take too long to be completed. For example, fixing the lift at court 2 lasted twelve weeks and refurbishing the bathrooms took more than six weeks. Students suggested that such long operations could take place during breaks in order to limit the levels of disruption.

Carr-Saunders House: CSH's residents appear satisfied with the refurbishments at the hall, commenting positively on the pleasant atmosphere and the modern design of the kitchens and bathrooms.

Grosvenor House: Students appear contented with the quality and timing of refurbishments.

High Holborn Residence: HHR presents numerous problems on the issue of refurbishments, with reports of *"major things getting broke on a regular basis without anyone repairing or replacing them"*. Also, students argued against having the renovations during term times, but conducting them instead before students move in. Although we acknowledge that refurbishments at HHR are a necessity and cannot be completed during breaks, we would encourage communicating and making this necessity very clear to students before renting.

Lilian Knowles House: Residents at the LKH show high levels of contentment with the state of the house. The main problem seems to be the small size of beds - even at large rooms, the rent of which is significantly higher, fostering higher expectations. Other minor issues, like stained wallpapers or more frequent refurbishments of the kitchen, were also individually raised.

Northumberland House: Students at NH appear very appreciative of the central location of the house and its sound condition. Residents gave positive feedback about the desks in the rooms and the study room.

Passfield Hall: Apart from suggesting the refurbishments taking place when students are not there, residents are very satisfied with PH on that respect.

Roseberry Hall: There are high levels of satisfaction among RH residents. There were only a few comments about refurbishment and these centred on condition of shower heads and bathrooms.

Sidney Webb House: SWH appears to have certain problems on the level of refurbishment that is happening. Students have identified a number of issues that need addressing, including old and stained carpets, unattended bathroom mold, unclean air vents, and kitchens that require immediate refurbishment.

Urbanest King's Cross: Since it is very recently constructed no students reported any need for refurbishments at the UKC.

Finally some students commented that refurbishments needed to take place in order to raise the levels of sustainability in LSE Halls of residence. For example residents at Northumberland House requested *"secure bike storage in halls."*

Wardens/Sub-wardens

Overall students were satisfied with the support and assistance they receive from the wardens and sub-wardens. On most occasions, the wardens' role is clearer to residents, however there are visibility issues or confusion amongst residents with regards to sub-wardens. Also the experience of students dealing with wardens did differ from hall to hall.

Bankside House: Most residents are aware of the wardens and sub-wardens and are satisfied with the support and guidance they receive from them. However, the communication with sub-wardens seems problematic for a number of students, who described them as unresponsive and rude.

Butler's Wharf Residence: There is a consensus on BWR that the wardens and sub-wardens are a hardworking and well informed team, always accessible to students, providing meaningful advice and support.

Carr-Saunders House: Similarly at CSH, wardens and sub-wardens appear to fulfil their role to the fullest. Students have many opportunities to meet the warden during coffee-mornings, while the sub-wardens are equally present and helpful.

Grosvenor House: Most residents are unaware of their existence and what the role of this team was.

High Holborn Residence: There are mixed views on the effectiveness and approachability of the warden, with a student commenting: *"[The warden] has not expressed any interest in helping with our discontent and engaging the management to mediate on our behalf."* Similarly, as in previous years, at HHR students are almost completely unaware of the Sub-Wardens.

Lilian Knowles House: On average, there were more positive than negative responses regarding the team at LKH, although the issue of lack of training is aptly reflected on this student's comment: *"[Wardens and sub-wardens] have to manage hundreds of students in a great variety of situations, including high stress or psychological distress and they don't get the least training for that. LSE should really reconsider providing these members of staff that have huge responsibility on their shoulders with appropriate training."*

Given that all wardens and sub wardens receive thorough and targeted training to live up to their pastoral and guidance duties the abovementioned comment urges us to further investigate the cause of such perceptions.

Northumberland House: The levels of satisfaction with the NH team are quite high, since the majority of students know the warden and the sub-wardens and feel they can easily approach them with their concerns.

Passfield Hall: There is a clear distinction at PH between the warden's and sub-wardens' performance. Students are very contented with the warden who is "brilliant and knows all the residents", whereas sub-wardens "may as well not exist". The reasons behind this asymmetry between the wardens and sub wardens should be further investigated and addressed.

Roseberry Hall: Most students seem to have a very positive experience when interacting with the warden and sub-warden team, who are “overall very helpful and friendly”. However, for few people sub-wardens appear inaccessible and for some international students the difference between the role of sub-wardens and the reception is obscure.

Sidney Webb House: Views on the SWH team are predominately positive.

Urbanest King’s Cross: There are no sub-wardens at Urbanest, but the feedback on the LSE School resident was all very positive. Almost all students consulted highlighted the speed in which he dealt with all problems and his overall helpfulness and support.

Pre-Arrival/Freshers/Orientation

The majority of students surveyed were very satisfied with pre-arrival information and orientation events. The move-in has been well organised throughout the residences, with almost no students reporting that their arrival was delayed or stressful. Some halls seem to perform particularly well, providing “*clear guidelines in booklets or email*” (Butler’s Wharf House) and “*helpful information about what is provided in the rooms*” (Roseberry Hall), while others struggle, providing information that are either “*little and confusing*” (Lilian Knowles House) or even worse “*inaccurate, misleading and missing*” (Grosvenor House).

One notable trend that arose in the course of this research was students feeling uncomfortable with the link between socialising and drinking alcohol. Students noted that they felt uncomfortable with the “*drinking culture*” that was present in their halls and that this had been especially apparent during the fresher’s period. Below are two comments which illustrate the feelings of some students about the social activities in halls.

“It was disorganised and intimidating. There were too many activities focused on drinking”

“The hall was highly focused on undergrads and clubbing over Fresher’s and I was v. [sic] uncomfortable.”

During our Fresher’s Fair the LSESU has made sure that there was a 50: 50 balance kept between alcoholic and non-alcoholic events in order to cater for all. We would encourage the Halls Committees to take good use of the handbook, regarding non-alcoholic events and how to build a sense of community within the halls.

Finally, the disparity of experience between students living in LSE halls of residence and students living in non-LSE accommodation, is aptly captured in the following account of a resident of Urbanest, which reveals the importance of establishing stronger links between the School and the residents of Urbanest and intercollegiate halls: “*I found the lead up and much of orientation very disorientating and my halls are new, far out, private and intercollegiate so we were largely ignored during the orientation period which was highly unpleasant.*”

Other students noted that they would appreciate the option of having organised social activity in conjunction with other LSE Halls of residences. For example this student from Northumberland House commented “*Joint events, or more events with other halls would make the halls socialising experience would be (sic) better, different, exciting.*”

Halls Committees

Overall students opinions of hall committees was positive with students commenting that the committees fulfil an important function in halls; organising social activities and providing an important liaison link between residents and the Warden.

However as with previous years residents are still reporting that they have concerns about the accountability of halls committees and the inclusiveness of some social activity they organise. An issue that was highlighted by students in the majority of halls surveyed was a concern over how halls committees chose to spend their budgets. There was a strong perception among a number of residents that committee budgets were primarily used to facilitate alcohol focused events. Where committees have organised social activity that is not centred on alcohol they received very positive comments from residents, indicating that there is an enthusiasm for such events. Special note was given to the committees at Butlers Wharf and Northumberland House where residents felt that their committees had really considered a variety of ways in which they could bring residents together.

When participating in the research members of halls committees themselves reported that they would benefit from better or additional training and support from the university or the students' union. They clearly identified a need for resources to receive additional support in managing the halls committees' budgets and banking.

IT Services

Despite high laptop/tablet ownership, throughout the halls there was a clear consensus that the computer room should be retained. It should not be assumed that all residents have access to computer equipment or are familiar with networking alternatives such as the Remote Desktop. Instead the focus should be on better maintaining the existing computers, since there are frequent reports of malfunctions left unattended.

Similarly students across all halls rejected the idea of replacing shared network printers with individual desktop printers. Once again residents suggested improving the maintenance of the printers that are already provided and ensuring there is always adequate supply of paper, toner and ink.

Overall, almost half of the respondents appear somewhat satisfied with the IT services and provisions; however maintenance remains the greatest source of discontent across all halls, with computers and printers not working for long periods of time. There was also an almost unanimous demand for introducing Wi-Fi connection to all halls that do not already have, and a general request to improve the connection quality, whether that was Wi-Fi or Ethernet.

Bankside House: Although students describe the existing IT provisions as “decent and adequate”, there is still an issue with the very slow internet connection speed and the constant need to log on to student com. The provision of printers is limited, and the situation gets worse from the fact that they “literally never work, and nobody fixes them”.

Butler’s Wharf Residence: One of the least problematic halls, students commented that the “computer room is satisfactory” and that IT services are “always up to date and failures and breakdowns are corrected”. Nevertheless, some respondents complained about the lack of paper in printers and the occasionally slow connection speed. It is worth mentioning that some residents suggested installing “specialist software on computers”, which exemplifies the distinct needs of graduate residents.

Carr-Saunders House: Students at CSH are on average quite satisfied with the IT provisions, although one resident complained that “the Wi-Fi in my room is very patchy and the Ethernet connection does not work”.

Grosvenor House: No problems reported at GH.

High Holborn Residence: No major issues reported at HHR; however students suggested that the overall provisions could be more up to date.

Lilian Knowles House: Only wired connection to the internet available, with no Wi-Fi provisions.

Northumberland House: High levels of satisfaction at NH with the IT services and the connection speed. Nevertheless, a number of students noted that “lots of computers often do not work”.

Passfield Hall: Most students at PH raised maintenance issues, since the “printers are never working”, and the “Wi-Fi is very bad”.

Roseberry Hall: The situation in RH appears to be relatively good, with the basic problem being the limited provision of computers. The situation gets worse by the fact that a number of students reported that the “computer room is constantly used by a group who leave their staff there”.

Sidney Webb House: There is a general dissatisfaction with the IT services at SWH, due to the lack of Wi-Fi provisions and the poor maintenance of printers and computers.

“Printers hardly ever work and many PCs have been out of order for the whole academic year”

“No Wi-Fi in the halls is ridiculous. The Ethernet does not even work in my room”

Urbanest King’s Cross: The basic problems at UKC are the lack of printing facilities and the slow Wi-Fi connection speed.

Common Areas

Almost all halls seem to accommodate their residents need for a space dedicated to recreation activities and social interaction at a satisfactory level. Issues of cleanliness were raised at some residences with subsequent suggestions for refurbishment. Game tables, e.g. tennis table, pool table, foosball, are much appreciated when present and desired when absent.

Furthermore, the stark majority of residents advocate for the creation of a study room in each hall. Such facilities would be particularly helpful for students living in remote sites, e.g. Butler's Wharf or Sidney Webb, since it would work as a convenient substitute for the library. In mixed halls it was suggested to have separate study rooms for undergraduates and postgraduates, in order to better accommodate their distinct study habits.

Bankside House: Students are very satisfied with the current provisions, although a few argued that the "bar needs refurbishment" and that the "pool tables need to be replaced".

Butler's Wharf Residence: All residents were particularly content with the common room and were very appreciative that they have 24 hour access to it.

Carr Saunders House: High levels of satisfaction with current provisions.

Grosvenor House: Residents appear contented with the common room, whereas cleanliness is the main source of complaints.

Lilian Knowles House: The common room at LKH does not seem to adequately create a friendly and inviting atmosphere that one would expect from such space. Students' comments point to minor adjustments that would immediately make the common room a more welcoming space:

"[The common room] has to have more flexible open hours, especially during the weekends"

"Posters – ones we have already are terrible"

"Couches smell bad, lighting is poor or flashy neon (smother lights would be nice?). Except for the Xbox and some board games, there's nothing (ping pong, foosball would be nice)"

Northumberland House: Residents commented that their common room was very small to cover the needs of all residents of a ten-storey building.

Passfield Hall: Residents are particularly satisfied with the ping pong and pool table.

Roseberry Hall: There was a mixed response from students at Roseberry regarding the provision of common room facilities. Some students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the common room, some students described it as *"too cold and impersonal"*, while a group of female residents complained that it is *"male dominated"*, which deters them from using it more frequently.

Sidney Webb House: Once again residents appear very appreciative of the pool and tennis table; however some students called for more cleanliness.

Urbanest King's Cross: Generally very high levels of satisfaction. A student noted that *"it is incredibly annoying that the rooftop terrace another facility that was a draw for this building – has been closed with no view reopening it"*.

Catering and Kitchens

Overall, catered halls (Bankside House, Carr-Saunders House, High Holborn Residence, Passfield Hall, Roseberry Hall) have been very well received, with students stressing the inherent social function that a canteen provides. Most dietary requirements were met successfully, except for two cases in Roseberry Hall, which although the hall failed to cater for a coeliac and a wheat intolerant residents, they were still obliged to pay. It was therefore raised that students in this situation should be able to opt-out of the catering element of halls fees.

On average, the quality of food has been satisfactory for students. Where complaints exist, they concern a perceived lack of variety rather than nutritional value. As in previous years, “jacket potatoes every day” was a common complaint.

In self – catered residences the most common source of dissatisfaction comes from issues of cleanliness and the lack of storage and fridge space. Other than that, students appear quite satisfied with the existing provisions.

“I am very satisfied with kitchen equipment, however as a UK student it is easy for me to transport a great deal of kitchenware (pans etc.). Overseas students are subject to weight restrictions when travelling so pre-equipped kitchens would benefit all”.

Butler’s Wharf Residence

“The catering is amazing. I wish they were more flexible with take away meals but I appreciate that they even take the time to do that as it is.”

Roseberry Hall

“I really like the variety! Concerning the portions, I am quite disappointed. I am a rower for the LSE rowing club and need a lot of food and there is no mechanism, e.g. paying additionally, to get extra big portions.”

Bankside House

“We were told there would be a cafe type facility available for our use. However it is now the end of lent term and it is still not open. I doubt that I will ever be able to use”

Urbanest Kings Cross

Room Allocation and Rent

The majority of students consulted were more or less satisfied with their room allocation. Across all halls the high cost of rent was the main source of discontent, especially for rooms poorly refurbished and maintained (Bankside House, High Holborn Residence, Sidney Webb House). Students appear wary of the distinct nature of the London's housing market and appreciative of the central location of most of the residences, however cautioned that increasing the rents would render university accommodation unaffordable for most students.

Additionally, there is little clarity regarding how room prices are decided. For example, at Lilian Knowles, Roseberry and Northumberland House residents reported that they pay the same price for rooms that vary widely in terms of size and provisions.

Finally, an incident of unfit room pairing was reported at Urbanest King's Cross with a student complaining that "I am a first year undergraduate and I have been put in a flat with 5 other postgraduates and I think is grossly inappropriate".

Below are some more comments we recorded which are representative of students' feelings about room allocation and rent

"The rent is unacceptably high for the poor condition and maintenance of the halls. Each room seems to be different at Sidney Webb - e.g. some with individual fridges, others where bathroom furnishings are installed inappropriately (shelf too close to sink so cannot wash your face properly etc.)"

Sidney Webb House

"Very expensive!! Plus laundry! I do think that the washing and drying machines should be common, but free of charge. We are already paying enough to live here to include the use of washing machines."

Lilian Knowles House

"I pay near the top rate of rent and I'm sure there are better rooms than mine. Some rooms have better views although residents pay the same. If you have similar views, then the rent should be the same. I understand that it is more expensive because of the location, it is quite small. If we don't know style of room, more option in choosing shape of room. knowing what kind of area I would find most comfortable. I see a brick wall outside my window. If we could see a floorplan (sic), there'd be more assurance and less complaints."

Northumberland House

Conclusion and Recommendations

The annual Your Hall Your Call research provides LSE Students' Union with an invaluable opportunity to understand the current student experience in LSE Halls of Residence and to furthermore gauge levels of student satisfaction with their living situation. Over the past four years Your Hall Your Call has also created an important opportunity for dialogue between students and the LSE residence team, who have made significant progress and changes as a result of the student feedback received.

Across all the halls we visited this year students commented that they really valued the opportunity that LSE Halls provided them for living in a central London location for an affordable price. They also valued the community and social experiences that halls provide.

Below are the 17 main recommendations that have emerged from our research and we look forward to working together with LSE to deliver on them and further improve the experiences of students living in LSE halls of residence.

1. Wherever possible maintenance work is completed as quickly as possible so that minimum disruption is caused to residents.
2. Long term maintenance and disrepair issues reported in some halls such as Passfield Hall should be addressed.
3. LSE should develop an online system where residents can log and track any maintenance issues or requests they have regarding their accommodation. This would instantly reduce the uncertainty students experience when they report maintenance issues and increase the efficiency of the response they receive.
4. Students' needs should be prioritised above those of commercial customers and as such the majority of refurbishment works should take place during the holiday period so they do not impact on residents.
5. Older or more run down halls should be considered for refurbishment. If there is no capacity to do this then this should be communicated to residents.
6. Social spaces and common rooms in halls should be as inclusive as possible with a range of activities on offer to students. Pool tables and table football tables are very well received so where possible this facility should be extended to halls that do not currently have them.
7. Halls Committees should be formally set up as societies within the students' union structures. This would allow Halls Committees to make use of the SU banking and finance systems, treasurer training and committee members training, increase the transparency and accountability of the Halls Committee structures, allow the Halls Committees easy access to their mailing lists, raise the profile of the Committees and finally it would make it possible to acknowledge the hard work and success of Halls Committees members by including them in the SU's STARS Awards.

8. Allow students with specific dietary requirements to opt out of catering if they are placed in catered halls.
9. All IT equipment in halls should be maintained to a high standard and the IT department at LSE should ensure the continued provision of communal printers and computers.
10. The fault reporting procedure for IT equipment should be clearly displayed and advertised in all halls.
11. The standard and speed of Wi-Fi in halls should be improved.
12. Where internet or Wi-Fi is provided by a third party provider there should be a communication and feedback process in place which allows residents to provide feedback regarding the standard of service they receive.
13. On an annual basis LSE should publish a transparent account to students on how the rent prices are set and why an annual rent increases need to take place.
14. LSE should provide a transparent account to students on how the pricing of rooms is determined.
15. Continue to increase the visibility and approachability of wardens and sub-warden teams.
16. Work to create more of a community for residents in Kings Cross Urbanest who currently feel isolated or excluded from LSE. The Intercollegiate Halls Ambassador Scheme is model worth considering in this context as it has been very successful in building a stronger sense of community in University of London Halls.
17. Gain clarification for residents in Kings Cross Urbanest as to when the café and roof terrace will be opening.