

Response from the Management Board of Imperial College London

To the note by the Union President on behalf of the Imperial College Union Council (22 February 2013)

The current position

The provision of suitable and affordable accommodation for Imperial students is a high priority for the College. It is committed to providing a range of accommodation options at a variety of prices, which reflect quality and location.

Imperial's guarantee of a place in halls for all first year students is better than most London universities that it is made irrespective of home location. Our provision of generous bursaries to home students makes a major contribution to those who most need help.

This academic year Imperial is investing £23 million in renewing Wilson House, and this will provide 127 more bed spaces just across Hyde Park from the South Kensington Campus. With the assistance of the Union, the College is aiming to offer 22 more bed spaces in Beit Hall in the next couple of years.

Garden Hall needs refurbishment and therefore will not be offered to students in 2013-14.

Evelyn Gardens cannot be offered forever in its present condition.

What the College is now planning to do

The College will continue to search for further reasonably priced accommodation as close to our campuses as practical.

The College will carefully weigh up all the options for future uses of Garden Hall, Evelyn Gardens and Pembridge Hall. These options will include continuing use as accommodation after any necessary refurbishment, recognising the benefits of maximising spaces close to College, but will include alternative options which could have substantial other benefits to College overall. Pembridge Hall does not need early refurbishment, but with only 96 bedspaces is currently well below the size at which it would be efficient to operate in the medium term and so a study will be undertaken to test the feasibility of extending the property to increase the number of bed spaces provided.

For Garden Hall and Evelyn Gardens it will be necessary to undertake full structural survey of the properties to provide a comprehensive understanding of the level of remedial work required and its associated cost, and this cannot happen before students have left at the end of Summer Term 2013.

After the results of these surveys are known in the autumn, the Management Board will evaluate the options and consult with students on the overall proposals by the end of 2013, before the College reaches a final decision.

Some aspects of the proposals may be commercially sensitive and therefore have to be restricted in circulation, for example because the College will need to negotiate with third parties on the way ahead.

Comment [PJB1]: We think this is the College accepting that there is demand for cheaper halls, close to College that might not be the highest specification possible, or that 'near College – the 'portfolio' doesn't have to be standardised. This needs to be clarified though.

Comment [PJB2]: Throughout the whole document, this is the only statement that annoys me: a guarantee of a place in halls is no good if the student can't afford the hall, or if the student could live closer and cheaper than in a College run hall of residence. The number of students receiving full bursaries each year is around 100, the number of students who come to the College around 3,000 – we must remember that anecdotally many international student come from modest-income backgrounds too.

Comment [PJB3]: The Union is incredibly keen for this proposal to continue.

Comment [PJB4]: This meets Union Council request 2.

Comment [PJB5]: This is a positive sign for both these areas, and goes some way to meeting requests 1 and 2.

Comment [PJB6]: This goes some way to meeting requests 3 and 4.

Comment [PJB7]: This indicates positively that Evelyn Garden's lease (as the leaseholder is the only third party involved) will be looked at, and goes some way to meeting request 2.

W3 and Wardening

The College has signed a contract for the development of W3. Over the coming two years, as the development and construction of W3 takes place, students, wardens and other staff with pastoral care responsibilities will be invited to guide plans for the services and facilities required to make it an attractive, supportive and sociable environment.

The wardening system is an essential part of the Imperial student experience, and is especially important for those living away from home for the first time. The College will provide wardening at W3 as it does at other halls, and does not yet have a firm plan for the number of wardens at W3. In addition it is intended to provide a 24/7 receptionist service at W3, which will provide practical support for students, although this is not intended in any way to detract from the pastoral care associated with wardening.

Comment [PJB8]: This goes some way to meeting request 5.

Comment [PJB9]: This accepts the Union's view that a receptionist cannot replace a Wardening team.

Charging for Accommodation

In terms of setting charges for undergraduate accommodation pricing, the College does not make a profit overall. Nor does it reflect the high property values of some Halls in accommodation charges. Future charges will inevitably need to reflect the costs of maintaining the buildings in an acceptable condition.