

College Accommodation Working Group

Attendees:

Chair: Jennie Watson – Deputy President (Welfare)	JW
Philip Kurukgy – Ordinary Member (FoE)	PK
Andrew Tranter – Campaigns Officer	AT
Saloni Datani – ICSMSU Academic Affairs Officer (Science Years)	SD

Purpose of the group

- To discuss and identify issues surrounding to cost of halls accommodation.
- To identify a clear and achievable course of action for the Union to take to tackle the cost of rent in College accommodation.

Matters discussed

- A proportion of rent for halls goes towards ‘capital costs’. It was agreed that current and future students should not be expected to pay for College’s investment into new halls and that accommodation should not be for profit.
- It was agreed that there is very little transparency regarding the use of rent. Students have the right to know how such large sums of their money are utilised.
- PK expressed belief that the halls amenities fund of £2 per person per week should be increased for those students paying higher rents to make up for their excessively high cost of rent.
- Allocation of halls is agreed to be a problem. The chance nature of the allocation system may be forcing students to take room types or halls which they did not want or cannot afford.
 - PK proposed a pooling system allowing students not satisfied with their original room allocation the opportunity to swap rooms prior to moving in
 - SD expressed interest in development of a more robust system for student hall preferences.
- PK stated that there are social issues in halls due to a higher proportion of international students living in South Kensington halls reducing diversity in Woodward.
- The current rent strikes at UCL were discussed, however the group was divided on this issue
- AT stated that the issue should be divided into efforts the Union can currently make to mitigate problems caused by such high rents, and long term campaigning to address to ‘bigger questions’ surrounding halls rent.
- PK stated his belief that there should be ‘more balance’ across the portfolio and that travel costs is not a justification for lower rents in Woodward
 - Concerns were expressed by JW and AT over a repeat of last year’s council vote on halls rent (https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/14-15/Union_Council/file/2866).
 - It was felt that this was not a victory for the union but actually an attempt by College to place blame and difficult decisions into the hands of Union Council, absolving the College of the decision.

- JW expressed concerns that 'tinkering' with the rent profile again would only lead to dissatisfaction from a different group of students and not actually solve the problem and potentially lead to the same discussions being had by the Union next year.

Actions

To investigate with the College how rent in halls could be better distributed and whether there may be any potential to alter the bottom line	JW
To find out exactly how revenue from halls rent is used	JW
To learn more about the UCL rent strikes	AT/PK
To seek student opinion and gather a larger campaign team	AT/PK
To liaise with the Campaigns & Representation Coordinator for campaign planning support	PK
To work with the Student Hub to improve the halls allocation procedure	JW/SD