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STUDENTS'
UNION

STUDENT VOICE REPORT

STUDENT HOUSING



Royal Holloway Students' Union
Student Voice Report: Student Housing

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Foreword: Kate Roberts, Students' Union President

For the majority of students at Royal Holloway, housing is an integral part of the student experience whether they live in University halls of residence or private accommodation in the wider area around the University. However, the housing experience is not always easy for students, and it can have a significant impact on student wellbeing and academic attainment. Students need a supportive living environment in order to succeed in their studies and fully engage with all aspects of the university experience at Royal Holloway.

I launched this piece of research in order to fully understand the issues students are facing when it came to their housing experience while studying at Royal Holloway, and to identify areas for improvement from both the University and the Students' Union in relation to improved housing provision and support. It is important to note that while this reflects on students' experiences of living in private accommodation, it cannot directly influence local estate agents and landlords.

This report has been developed over one calendar year and two academic years during a global pandemic which has drastically impacted the way in which the University has been able to operate. Many students were unable to fully utilise their housing during this time in both University halls of residence and the private sector, and for some students this has exacerbated previous issues negatively impacting their housing experience. It remains unclear what the long term impacts of the pandemic will be on student housing, or how it will influence students' decisions about where to live during their time at Royal Holloway, but it is clear there is an immediate move towards a desire for greater flexibility with contracts.

I would like to thank all of the students, University staff members and local landlords and estate agents who engaged with the Students' Union and helped shape the final recommendations. I hope this Student Voice Report succeeds in its aim to provide a positive agenda for developing housing provision and support moving forward, particularly as new housing developments are being built on the Egham campus over the next few years.

Housing, and its surrounding support, at Royal Holloway has a real opportunity over the next few years to better suit the needs of changing student demographics and has the potential to provide an enriched, supportive and comfortable university experience for all regardless of their living situation.

Executive Summary

This Student Voice Report examines the current student housing situation at Royal Holloway in the University halls of residence as well as private rental properties in the surrounding area. Our Policy Inquiry into this area of the student experience began in May 2020, and our research and engagement with students, University stakeholders, local landlords and estate agents shaped the recommendations included in this report. The Students' Union is aware that some of these recommendations require a significant amount of change within some of the University's professional service departments, or they are unable to come into effect until the new Halls of Residence, Rusham Park, has been fully developed. As a result, some of these recommendations will occur over an extended period of time. It is also important to note that the Students' Union understands there are added limitations to what recommendations we can reasonably make in the private sector, however, we believe the recommendations we have made in this area will have a positive impact on current and prospective students' housing experience in the private sector.

Below are a summarised list of recommendations which can be found in full at the end of the document.

1.1 The University should review the way its professional service teams involved with University halls of residence manage student enquiries about accommodation and consider how they can have a more coordinated and streamlined accommodation response through a Student Enquiry Management system.
1.2 The University should collate all halls information in a single place on both the University website and Royal Holloway App with a view to moving all information to the Royal Holloway App when it has more widespread use by students.
1.3 The University should be more transparent about the financial distribution of University halls fees, and this information should be signposted clearly on the Accommodation webpage.
1.4 The University should consider including more visual material about University halls to make the Accommodation webpage more engaging and informative for prospective and current students when applying for a halls place.
1.5 The University should trial the introduction of lifestyle flats for the following categories: alcohol free, single-sex, LGBTQ+, and quiet halls.
1.6 The University should consider including a set number of flexible room bookings in University halls of residence.
1.7 The University should consider reviewing the price bands of self-catered rooms in older halls of residence.
1.8 The University should review its current policy around out-of-hours and crisis support to determine whether it is fit for purpose and prioritises students' wellbeing for students who live both on- and off-campus.
1.9 The University Hall Life team should continue to work closely with the Students' Union Advice Centre and circulate information in their newsletters and on the Royal Holloway App about the Students' Union HouseMating service.
2.1 The University should review the current software used for halls applications and decide whether it is fit for purpose. If it is decided that a change in software needs to occur, the University should additionally review its allocation process.
2.2 The University should consider streamlining the application process by reducing the number of halls students rank, and by changing the way room options are labelled in the application.

3.1 Working in collaboration, the University and Students' Union should undertake a general review focusing on security and safety on campus.
3.2 The University should make sure information about reporting harassment and assault is clearly signposted on the University website so students fully understand the options and support available to them.
3.3 The University should conduct a review to better understand the harassment of women in halls, implementing changes to processes and/or procedures where appropriate.
3.4 The University should introduce a policy which states that broken locks on halls' exterior and interior doors will be resolved in a 24 hour period. In instances where this is not possible, an alternative solution needs to be in place.
3.5 The University should work with students to conduct a review of the current guest policy, including its purpose and effectiveness.
4.1 The University should discuss with the service provider whether integration of SMART technology is possible in a set number of flats, or all flats at Rusham Park.
5.1 The Students' Union should give the Housing Rights blog series a more permanent place on the Students' Union webpage and ensure it is easily accessible for students to find.
5.2 The Students' Union Advice Centre should consider recording three short videos explaining in brief the services offered at the Advice Centre for each stage of the student private housing lifecycle: Looking, Living and Leaving.
5.3 The Students' Union should have regular reviews of their communications plan around housing blogs and articles which are sent out to students, agents and landlords to ensure messaging is clear, appropriate and up-to-date.
5.4 The Students' Union should continue to investigate ways to have a successful working relationship with landlords and estate agents in the local area.

Section A: The Context

A1. Overview:

The issues surrounding student accommodation have been discussed at length in the last decade by education policymakers, charities, research bodies and the UK government because of the crucial role student housing plays in the decision-making process when prospective students apply to university. This question of where, and how, students will live is 'a major part of the education offer' which has the potential to 'contribute significantly to their overall educational experience'.¹ The UK stands out within the international higher education sector because an 'overwhelming majority of full-time students' depart home in the autumn in what has been 'termed a "mass migration"' across Britain.² This annual movement across the country highlights the importance of continued discussion around the ways we can improve student housing because the demand for it will only continue to grow as university students choose to move away from their home 'to benefit from a fully immersive higher education experience'.³ It cannot be overstated enough that 'living in a supportive environment', whether it be university residences, private purpose-built halls or private housing, gives students the opportunity to thrive at university as they undertake their studies and form social bonds with other students who will likely become lifelong friends.⁴

When former VP Education and now SU President, Kate Roberts, decided to open a Policy Inquiry on the Royal Holloway student housing experience in March 2020, the Students' Union knew it would be a large undertaking. These concerns were not only because the issue is so complex, but because we questioned how much influence we would have with making recommendations to make student housing better, especially in the private sector. Despite these initial concerns, this Policy Inquiry instigated essential conversations with current students, key University stakeholders, the Students' Union Advice Centre, landlords and estate agents in the wider community around Royal Holloway.

Our engagement with these different groups gave us the opportunity to better understand students' experiences of living on campus in University halls of residence as well as in private halls and private housing. These conversations happened over the course of one calendar year and two academic years, and we gained a huge amount of insight. We learned, for example, there are a range of professional service teams available to support students who reside in University halls of residence, but one of the drawbacks to this current set up is that it is easier for students to fall through the cracks when making inquiries. Additionally, we discovered the University offers current and prospective students a wide variety of room options and price bands, however, there is a lack of budget room options available and affordability is a major concern for many Royal Holloway students. The Students' Union also

¹ Sarah Jones and Martin Blakely, *Student Accommodation: The Facts*, Higher Education Policy Institute (August 2020), < <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HEPI-Student-Accommodation-Report-FINAL.pdf>> [accessed 10 August 2020] (pg. 9)

² William Whyte, *Somewhere to live: Why British students study away from home—and why it matters*, Higher Education Policy Institute Report 121, (November 2019) <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/HEPI_Somewhere-to-live_Report-121-FINAL.pdf> [accessed 14 April 2020] (pgs. 7, 9).

³ John Wakeford, 'Foreword' in *Somewhere to live: Why British student study away from home—and why it matters*, Higher Education Policy Institute Report 121, (November 2019) <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/HEPI_Somewhere-to-live_Report-121-FINAL.pdf> [accessed 14 April 2020] (pg. 4).

⁴ Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and Frank Knight, *The Student Accommodation Survey, 2018/19*, (2019) <<https://content.knightfrank.com/research/1663/documents/en/knight-frank-ucas-student-housing-survey-201819-6002.pdf>> [accessed 28 September 2020] (pg. 3).

learned more about the University's financial investment in their halls of residence and process behind the distribution of fees towards the daily running of halls, maintenance and repairs, additional services like cleaning and their five-year refurbishment plans for older residences. We feel students would hugely benefit from more transparency around the University halls financial process to help manage expectations with cost and understand better where their accommodation fees go. Other comments raised from our discussions and online surveys were the lack of out-of-hours crisis and wellbeing support, confusion about the halls application process, security concerns, disrepair, communication failures with landlords and estate agents and, finally, that student support for students living in both halls of residence and the private sector could be improved and made more easily accessible on both the University and Students' Union webpages. The above examples are only a small sample of issues raised, and this Student Voice Report will further examine those areas of the student housing experience which are working at Royal Holloway and those which could be improved.

In addition to gaining first-hand knowledge from students, University stakeholders and private landlords, the Students' Union examined the key national issues surrounding student housing with an aim to see which ones resonated strongly with Royal Holloway students in our later surveys. Many of the key reports on student housing in the UK higher education sector are updated annually, and we continued our research throughout the entirety of this Policy Inquiry. We focused our attention on major reports and surveys published within the last six years by the National Union of Students (NUS), The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), the University and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS), Save the Student, Unipol and the Department of Education. The remaining sections below introduce three key national housing issues which we believe have the most impact on Royal Holloway students' overall educational experience and will be explored in more detail in Section C of this report.

A2. Affordability

It is unsurprising to learn that affordability is the primary area of concern for higher education policymakers. NUS and Unipol jointly publish a report based upon the Accommodation Costs Survey which runs every few years. In 2018 they revealed the national '[a]verage rent levels now account for 73 per cent of the student loan, up from 58 per cent only six years ago'.⁵ In university halls of residences and private purpose-built student accommodation with an average contract lengths of 40 weeks, the average annual student rent for the 2017-18 academic year outside of London was £6,366 and £8,875 for students studying within the London area.⁶ Royal Holloway is a member institution within the University of London, and current and prospective students are entitled to receive a higher rate of Maintenance Loan to cover the London weighting. Despite this monetary increase, a student's eligibility is entirely dependent on their household's financial circumstances, and they are not guaranteed to receive the maximum amount of the Maintenance Loan. Moreover, students in their final year of study automatically receive less than in previous years, and this has a major impact on their housing choices and costs as rents continue to rise.

100 Higher education institutions and private and charitable providers participated in the 2018 Accommodation Costs Survey, and NUS and Unipol found 'the balance between the three primary stock types (standard self-catered, en-suite self-catered and studio flats) has changed considerably' in university residences and private purpose-built student accommodation with

⁵ National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (2018), <https://www.unipol.org.uk/getmedia/ead8ba2b-d770-4127-83e2-0dc93835e2d8/Accommodation_CostSurvey_2018_FullReport_WEB.PDF.aspx> [accessed 28 September 2020] (pg. 4)

⁶ National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (pg. 7).

en-suite self-catered accommodation 'amounting to 58 per cent of total rooms in the survey'.⁷ The survey additionally found that self-catered standard rooms with shared facilities, which are usually lower-cost options for student residents, have reduced from 24 percent to 17 per cent in the period from 2012-2019.⁸ Education policymakers are concerned with this decrease because the loss of standard stock has a direct impact on university halls' affordability status. The lack of lower-cost rooms will eventually price out students and deny them the opportunity to experience living on campus and form social connections which is what a high majority of first-year students' desire when they come to university. It is in an institution's best interest to keep standard stocks available because, as UCAS and Frank Knight maintain in their report, *The Student Accommodation Survey* (2021), universities that offer a wider range of accommodation 'price points' are currently perceived to be 'greater value for money than other accommodation options'.⁹ While many students prefer newer en-suite rooms, the 2018 Accommodation Costs Survey found that students who were previously worried about sharing personal space with a stranger in shared accommodation quickly overcame any initial concerns once they settled into their university life.¹⁰

From a fees perspective, students who live in university residences and private purpose-built student accommodation, regardless of room type, pay inclusive rent fees towards additional services like security, maintenance and repairs, mail management, customer services, Wi-Fi, utilities, cleaning, residential life or social support, and staff training in mental health and first aid.¹¹ A high-quality centralised management system in university and private halls of residence can absolutely have a positive impact on a students' satisfaction with their accommodation and increases its value for money. In terms of the provisions of furniture and fixtures, university and private halls of residence have bedroom furnishings which include a desk, and standard kitchen amenities are placed in shared living spaces.

The concerns around living costs and affordability are not solely associated with university halls of residences and also extends into the private housing sector. Holding deposits, rent, utilities and extra instalments for not having a guarantor all contribute towards expenses in the private sector. The NUS surveyed students in 2018 for their ongoing *Homes Fit for Study* series and found that a third of respondents who lived in private housing spent half of their income on living costs, a further third spent three quarters of their income and another third spent nearly all of their income on housing costs.¹² In the private sector, students usually live in shared households with fellow university students they have already formed social bonds with, which is why the private sector is particularly appealing to continuing students rather than first-years.

The NUS report, *Homes Fit for Study* (2019), found that 40 percent of respondents had one to three flatmates and an additional 29 per cent of respondents had four or more.¹³ Like university residences and private purpose-built student accommodation, most shared properties in the private sector include basic household furnishings and fixtures. Property conditions in shared student housing in the private sector is often kept at a much lower

⁷ National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (pg. 9).

⁸ National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (pg. 9).

⁹ Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and Frank Knight, *The Student Accommodation Survey 2021*, (2021), <<https://content.knightfrank.com/research/1663/documents/en/knight-frank-ucas-student-accommodation-survey-report-2021-7707.pdf>> [accessed 10 May 2021] (pg.7).

¹⁰ National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (pg. 51).

¹¹ Sarah Jones and Martin Blakely, *Student Accommodation: The Facts*, (pg. 37).

¹² National Union of Students, *Homes Fit for Study*, 3rd edn, (2019)

<<https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/homes-fit-for-study-document>> [accessed 29 September 2020] (pg. 20).

¹³ National Union of Students, *Homes Fit for Study*, 3rd edn, (p. 20).

standard than university halls of residence despite being subject to stringent government regulation. NUS found in this same report that there were extensive instances of private rental properties being let to students ‘in a condition which is breach of the legally binding Housing Health and Safety Ratings, and behaviour from landlords and agents which is a breach of the Housing Act of 2004, the Protection from Eviction Act 1977, Consumer Protection Law, and various pieces of legislation’.¹⁴

While private rentals are often cheaper than university halls of residences and private purpose-built accommodation, the rental averages for all three types of housing choices in many of the national surveys reveal that a large majority of students are paying extremely high costs in all three of these accommodation types. Students are sometimes left with anywhere from £2000-£3,000 to cover the remainder of their living costs for the entire year depending on the amount they received for their Maintenance Loan.¹⁵ In some instances it could even be less, and this financial shortage creates another pressure students are forced to deal with during their studies. The Department of Education’s *Review of Post-18 Education and Funding* (2019), also known as the Auger Review, agrees the current problem with student living costs are ‘often a greater cause of anxiety for students than the level of debt incurred from tuition fees’.¹⁶ Despite these findings, the Department of Education has indicated there won’t be an increase in the student Maintenance Loan anytime soon. Higher education institutions and private providers should therefore lay the groundwork and find alternative ways to make student housing more affordable because ‘it is unlikely central Government will look at rent controls to introduce rent ceilings’.¹⁷

HEPI explain in their report, *Student Accommodation: The Facts* (2020), that there are ‘two approaches to offering affordable rent in student housing’.¹⁸ Firstly, HEPI maintain affordability is not about ‘keeping all rents low’—because some students want higher-cost accommodation—but it *is* about offering a wider variety of rents to meet the demand for low-cost accommodation options from students unable to afford more expensive stock. There is a real concern among higher education policymakers that the ‘natural supply of low-cost accommodation’ will eventually disappear as older residence buildings get demolished, refurbished or replaced by newer, more expensive flats.¹⁹ The second approach listed by HEPI is the NUS affordability policy which states that new university residences and private purpose-built student accommodation rents outside of London should be ‘no more than 50 per cent of the maximum amount of student finance available in England (£4,350 in 2018/19), and that providers should ensure at least a quarter of their portfolio sits within this cap’.²⁰ NUS affordability measures have also been included in the New London Plan, which requires that ‘[a]ll new student accommodation in London must reserve 35 per cent of all available bedrooms and offer them at rent no higher than 55 per cent of the student loan rate, or be subject to viability testing’.²¹ While the NUS affordability policy and New London Plan have no sway in the private sector, there is a hope that the competition with university and private halls will also help keep private rentals lower in university areas. Section C of this report will further explore where Royal Holloway fits into this NUS affordability plan and the New London Plan,

¹⁴ National Union of Students, *Homes Fit for Study*, 3rd edn, (pgs. 28-9).

¹⁵ Sarah Jones and Martin Blakely, *Student Accommodation: The Facts*, (pg. 26).

¹⁶ Department of Education, *Review of Post-18 Education and Funding* (May 2019), <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805127/Review_of_post_18_education_and_funding.pdf> [accessed 10 March 2021] (pg. 188).

¹⁷ Sarah Jones and Martin Blakely, *Student Accommodation: The Facts*, (pg. 27).

¹⁸ Sarah Jones and Martin Blakely, *Student Accommodation: The Facts*, (pg. 26).

¹⁹ Sarah Jones and Martin Blakely, *Student Accommodation: The Facts*, (pg. 26).

²⁰ National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (pg. 42).

²¹ Sarah Jones and Martin Blakely, *Student Accommodation: The Facts*, (pg. 26).

as well as the financial impact the cost of living has on Royal Holloway students' higher education experience.

A3. Wellbeing

The results from the 2018 Accommodation Costs Survey revealed that 'three quarters (74 per cent) of survey respondents report that they have seen an increase in the number of mental-health related issues among students they have housed in the last five years (88 and 55 per cent of institutions and private providers respectively)'.²² The need for mental health and wellbeing support within the higher education sector is an issue which has gained traction in recent years and has been covered widely in the media. Because of this increased focus on the current provisions offered to university students, higher education institutions have made huge strides to improve mental health awareness and increase students' access to services throughout their time at university. However, there is still more work to be done in this area, especially with out-of-hours and crisis help within student accommodation settings.

Universities UK highlights in their report, *Student mental wellbeing in higher education: Good practice guide* (2015), that mental health and wellbeing difficulties can affect students at any moment during their studies and, while the causes may vary for each individual, there are 'particular aspects of the higher education experience and environment' which generate high periods of stress for students.²³ The report further maintains 'transitions points' are especially difficult for students like when they leave home for the first time to begin their courses and are forced to adapt 'to significant changes in their lifestyle' while simultaneously 'adjusting to study'.²⁴ Moving to a new accommodation setting—whether it is either university halls of residence, private purpose-built accommodation or the private sector—is a major transition point. This new living situation, which can change every year of study, is additionally situated in the rare position of being a physical space where the 'the social, domestic and academic lives of students' intersect.²⁵ One example of how students' mental health suffers in their living situation is directly tied with affordability. Save the Student run an annual National Student Accommodation Survey, and in their published results for 2020 they found 51 per cent of survey respondents struggle to keep up with rent, 54 per cent of respondents state their mental health suffers and 36 per cent find this problem negatively impacts their studies.²⁶ It is therefore unsurprising that student respondents in the 2020 National Student Survey run by UCAS and Frank Knight ranked their housing situation as 'the most important factor influencing student wellbeing'.²⁷ These correlations highlight why it is so important some form of pastoral provision or wellbeing service should have a permanent place in students' accommodation or deals specifically with the issues repeatedly associated with student housing, including the private sector. UCAS and Frank Knight also found in their 2021 survey that '[c]ommunity is also a significant factor' to supporting students' wellbeing at university,

²² National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (pg. 62).

²³ Universities UK, *Student mental wellbeing in higher education: Good practice guide*, (2015) <<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2015/student-mental-wellbeing-in-he.pdf>> [accessed 20 April 2021] (pg. 8).

²⁴ Universities UK, *Student mental wellbeing in higher education*, (pg. 8).

²⁵ Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and Frank Knight, *National Student Accommodation Survey 2020*, (2020) <<https://content.knightfrank.com/research/1663/documents/en/knight-frank-ucas-student-accommodation-survey-report-2020-6841.pdf>> [accessed 28 September 2019] (pg. 16).

²⁶ Ruth Bushi, 'National Student Accommodation Survey 2020', Save the Student, 18 February 2020, <<https://www.savethestudent.org/accommodation/national-student-accommodation-survey-2020.html>> [accessed 19 April 2021].

²⁷ UCAS and Frank Knight, *National Student Accommodation Survey 2020*, (pg. 17).

with 88 per cent of first-year students and 80 per cent of returning students ‘identifying a good campus atmosphere’ and the ability to make new friends as central factors to their wellbeing.²⁸

William Whyte, Professor of Social and Architectural History at Oxford, argues in his paper *Somewhere to live: Why British students study away from home—and why it matters* (2019) that there needs to be ‘a more general, national discussion about what we think we are achieving when students leave home for university. We need to think about how their experience can be supportive, educationally enriching and open to all’.²⁹ These questions also apply to students who live in private housing in the wider area surrounding universities as well as commuter students. Importantly, these discussions around the different types of wellbeing and pastoral provisions to support student housing issues may differ across UK higher education institutions because their available stock and accommodation trends will all be different. There is no universal solution which will fix all of the housing issues that negatively impact a students’ wellbeing and overall university experience in the UK. That is why it is so important for universities to tackle the problems which most affect their student population. Section C of this report will examine Royal Holloway’s current provision of student wellbeing services and how they support students in university halls of residence, the private sector and commuter students, especially in regards to wellbeing issues which arise directly from their current living situations.

A4. Coronavirus and the future of student housing

During the early-stages of our of research, the UK was in the middle of its first nation-wide lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic and a large-majority of Royal Holloway students had left campus and the local area to quarantine with their families at home. The Students’ Union knew this mass-exodus of students across the country would signal a shift in the conversations around the future of student housing. Since the start of this Policy Inquiry the UK has undergone three lockdown periods which have significantly impacted both students’ studies as well as their housing situations.

Anna McKie maintains in her article, ‘Could the coronavirus demolish the student accommodation market’ (2020), that ‘[t]he varied responses’ to the pandemic by universities, private purpose-built student accommodation providers and private landlords ‘have highlighted the fragmented nature of the sector in the UK and elsewhere’.³⁰ UCAS and Frank Knight reiterate these sentiments in their results for their 2021 Student Accommodation Survey: ‘the survey suggests students’ experience of the pandemic is markedly different depending on the type of accommodation they live in’.³¹ Positive responses about their accommodation provider in the survey were largely a consequence of university residences and private hall providers being able to prematurely end tenancy agreements, offer rent refunds and the ability to provide student residents with regular updates on the evolving situation. Negative responses mainly centred on the issue of private landlords having a lack of sympathy about students’ financial situations and being reluctant to grant tenants a discount on rent or early termination of their contract. Other comments mentioned a lack of communication between landlords and students negatively impacted their satisfaction with their accommodation.³²

²⁸ UCAS and Frank Knight, *The Student Accommodation Survey 2021*, (pg.16)

²⁹ William Whyte, *Somewhere to live*, (pg. 41).

³⁰ Anna McKie, ‘Could the coronavirus demolish the student accommodation market’ *Times Higher Education*, 23 July 2020 <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/could-coronavirus-demolish-student-accommodation-market>> [accessed 21 April 2020].

³¹ UCAS and Frank Knight, *The Student Accommodation Survey 2021*, (p. 9).

³² UCAS and Frank Knight, *The Student Accommodation Survey 2021*, (p. 9).

From a purely financial point of view, Save the Student estimates ‘nearly £1 billion has been wasted by students on unusable accommodation’ because of the pandemic.³³ In their 2021 Student Accommodation Survey they found that two-thirds of students in university accommodation requested a refund with just under 1 in five students asking their private landlord the same request. Overall across all accommodation types, about one third of student respondents were given a rent refund—9 per cent received a full rebate and 23 per cent were given a partial discount on rent. In terms of accommodation providers, Save the Student found that 63 per cent of students in university residence received a full or partial refund, 32 per cent of students in private purpose-built student accommodation received a full or partial refund and only six per cent of students living in private housing were offered a discount.³⁴ Save the Student additionally tracked housing trends throughout the 2020-21 academic year and published comparisons between the autumn and spring terms in their 2021 survey results. The table below presents students’ housing choices as the beginning of the academic year versus their living situations in the Spring Term following the UK’s third national lockdown in January 2021.

Save the Student, National Students Accommodation Survey 2021			
Students’ Living Situation: Autumn 2020-21		Students’ Living Situation: Spring 2021	
Accommodation Type	% of respondents	Accommodation Type	% of respondents
Private Landlord	39	Same as Autumn	52
Uni Accommodation	34	With Parents	32
Private Halls	15	Private landlord	9
With parents	10	Private Halls	1
Other	2	Uni Accommodation	1
Own Property	1	Live in Own Property	1
		Other	1

Table 1: Students’ Living Situations 2020-21, Save the Student, National Student Accommodation Survey, 2021.

While many students chose not to return to their university accommodation, a large majority of students have been unable to return to university residences after lockdown periods have ended because of continued government restrictions and, for many students, their room has sat empty for a large portion of the year. As mentioned, students in university accommodation have had more success with receiving rent rebates, but it is not usually the case for students in private halls and rentals. While it can be argued that students in these accommodation types have had the opportunity to return, there is still the issue of students having to undergo entirely digital learning throughout the entire academic year and they question whether it is worth

³³ Jess Aszkenasy, ‘How coronavirus impacts students and what to do in 2021’, Save the Student, 20 April 2021, <<https://www.savethestudent.org/save-money/lifestyle/coronavirus-advice-university.html>> [accessed 23 April 2021].

³⁴ Laura Brown, ‘National Student Accommodation Survey 2021’, *Save the Student*, 16 February 2021 <<https://www.savethestudent.org/accommodation/national-student-accommodation-survey-2021.html>> [accessed 3 May 2021].

returning to these residences when they can undergo their studies at home where they have a strong support network with their families.

In addition to the financial issues associated with the pandemic, there have been additional factors which negatively impacted students living situations and overall university experience throughout the 2020-21 academic year like having to undergo periods of self-isolation in university residences, private halls and private rentals. Current government guidelines around households additionally prevented students from mixing with friendship groups who lived outside their residence, and this has absolutely had a negative impact on first-year students' ability to make new friends. Moreover, the household bubble legislation has had a domino effect on students' future accommodation choices, especially in the private sector, with many students unable to find roommates for next year when they are unlikely to be given a place in university halls of residence as continuing students. Section C of this report will further examine the impact the pandemic has had on current Royal Holloway students' living situations, and discuss what the future of Royal Holloway housing may look like as we lift restrictions and return to a more traditional form of education.

Section B: Methodology

Interest in student housing as a potential Policy Inquiry began during the 2020 SU Elections. During her time as VP Education, Kate Roberts spoke with current Royal Holloway students about their individual housing situations and learned it was an issue which had the potential to hugely impact—both positively and negatively—their overall higher educational experience. She consequently listed Royal Holloway student housing as one of her key manifesto points when running for SU President.

Following the SU election cycle and the election of Kate as SU President for the 2020-21 academic year, the UK government declared the first national lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. Because universities were unable to engage with current students in person for an undetermined amount of time, and the government indicated there was no clear exit route from lockdown for the remainder of the academic year, it was decided the best way to engage with Royal Holloway students and gain insight about their housing experiences was through online surveys. As a result, the initial stages of the Royal Holloway Student Housing Policy Inquiry began in Term Three of the 2019-20 academic year with the inclusion of 16 questions about student housing in our annual Rate Your Union survey in May 2020.

Rate Your Union is a survey put out by the Students' Union in Term Three each academic year, and it gives students the opportunity to assess and provide feedback on activities run by the Students' Union. We have previously used Rate Your Union as a launching point for other Policy Inquiries like Careers Support in 2019. The 16 housing questions in the 2020 Rate Your Union survey were composed as a mixture of open and closed questions which asked students about their experiences of living in both University halls and the private sector in the local area. The questions we included in the 2020 Rate Your Union survey can be found in Appendix A at the end of this report.

Rate Your Union was open for a two-week period from 29 May to 14 June 2020, and had a total of 742 respondents. The UK government began lifting lockdown restrictions while the survey was open, however, it was expected that engagement with the survey would be lower than in previous years because many students remained at home with their families. The number of student respondents who answered the housing questions in Rate Your Union ranged anywhere from 293 to 742 depending on the question. The Students' Union anonymised responses and began analysis in Term One of the 2020-21 academic year. During this period we also undertook research on key issues surrounding student housing at a national level within the last decade to compare with the survey results. Students' responses to the housing section in the 2020 Rate Your Union survey gave us a more nuanced understanding about the Royal Holloway student housing experience and helped shape the direction of the Policy Inquiry in the subsequent months.

For the first time since the introduction of Policy Inquiries, the Students' Union spoke with University stakeholders in the early phase of our research throughout Term One. SU President, Kate Roberts, spoke with key members of staff from the following professional service departments: Student and Academic Services, Commercial Services, International Student Support, Hall Life, Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) and Student Wellbeing. These early conversations with the University staff were invaluable with providing the Students' Union with detailed information on how the Royal Holloway runs and maintains its hall of residences. Moreover, many stakeholders we met with highlighted some current areas of improvement the University was already aware of and, when addressed, has the potential to positively impact students' experiences in halls. These initial conversations helped shape some of the final recommendations in this report.

While Term One focused almost entirely on learning more about Royal Holloway halls of residence, the Students' Union spent a large portion of Term Two gathering information about

the housing situation in the private sector with an aim to better understand both students' and landlords' needs and expectations in this increasingly competitive market. In January 2021, the Students' Union sent a survey to private landlords and ten estate agencies in the local area who work closely with our Advice Centre. The survey was composed of 29 open and closed questions and had a total of 42 respondents, with 35 private landlords and seven estate agents participating. The questions to the Private Housing survey can be found in Appendix B at the end of this report. In addition to the online survey, the Students' Union hosted an online meeting with landlords and estate agents while the survey was live to further discuss their current and previous experiences with student tenants. This meeting was attended by the SU President, a member of our Advice Centre and fourteen landlords and estate agents. The Students' Union anonymised survey results and began analysis following the survey's close.

Our conversations with University stakeholders, local landlords and estate agents gave the Students' Union an outside perspective about the student housing situation at Royal Holloway and the surrounding area, and we decided a second survey aimed at students was needed to further explore the issue in more detail than the previous Rate Your Union questions. The second Student Housing survey was composed of 37 open and closed questions and was open to current Royal Holloway students in February 2021. The survey questions in full can be found in Appendix C at the end of this report.

At the time of this second survey, universities and students' unions across the UK were once again unable to engage with students in person because of the coronavirus pandemic. We understood students' had spent the majority of the academic year undergoing purely digital or blended learning, and were experiencing survey and overall lockdown fatigue. The survey was sent out to all Royal Holloway students at the end of January and remained open for one month with an aim to gain a minimum of 150-200 respondents. When the survey closed at the end of February we had a total of 329 student respondents, and our total engagement with Royal Holloway students online reached a maximum of 1,071 students over the course of one calendar year.

The Students' Union anonymised and analysed the results of this survey in March 2021 and began drafting a potential list of recommendations for this Student Voice Report. These recommendations were shaped from our interactions with current students, University stakeholders, local landlords and estate agents. Once an initial draft of these recommendations were completed, President Kate Roberts participated in a second round of meetings with key University stakeholders in Term Three of the 2020-21 academic year to discuss these potential recommendations in further detail. A final list was drafted in May 2021, and the full list of finalised recommendations can be found at the end of this report.

Section C: The Context

C1. Overview

The subsequent sections of this report will discuss the following topics in further detail: affordability, wellbeing, the halls application process, student satisfaction in University halls of residence, student satisfaction in private housing and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on student housing. All of the information presented in this section of the report has been taken from our conversations with University stakeholders, the Students' Union's 2020 Rate Your Union survey, 2021 Student Housing survey and the 2021 Estate Agent and Landlord survey.

The table below presents the percentage of survey respondents separated by living situation for both Rate Your Union and the Student Housing survey.

Rate Your Union, 2020		Student Housing survey, 2021	
	% of respondents		% of respondents
Live in University or private halls of residence	51.50	Live in University or private halls of residence	60.49
Live in private housing in the wider area around RHUL	48.50	Live in private housing in the wider area around RHUL	39.51

Table 2: University, private halls and private housing breakdown, Rate Your Union, 2020, and Student Housing survey, 2021

C2. Looking for housing: University halls of residence

Currently at Royal Holloway there are over 3,400 bed spaces available spread across 14 halls of residence. 13 of those halls are situated on the main Egham campus with Kingswood being the only University hall of residence located off-campus in Englefield Green about a mile from Royal Holloway.³⁵ Students who are based at our Bedford Square campus in London are eligible to apply for a bed space at the University of London Intercollegiate Student Halls. We will only be looking at University halls of residence based on and around the Egham campus for this Student Voice Report.

To quickly summarise, new undergraduates and postgraduates who are studying full time are given priority when applying for halls, but Royal Holloway does reserve a limited number of spaces for continuing students. New undergraduate applicants who hold a conditional firm or unconditional firm offer from Royal Holloway receive an accommodation guarantee from the University, and applicants who receive a place through Clearing may receive a later accommodation guarantee depending on availability. There are also additional processes in place for students who need a specific type of room and are assessed by the University's Disability and Dyslexia Services (DDS) team.³⁶ Postgraduates who accept an offer to study full time are eligible to apply for a place in University halls, however, international postgraduate taught students who live outside the EU are the only cohort in the postgraduate community who are given an accommodation guarantee. Like undergraduates, there is a guarantee for postgraduates if they receive a recommendation from the University's DDS team.³⁷ As

³⁵ Royal Holloway University of London, 'Student Accommodation Allocation Policy 2020/21', <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/media/14821/accommodation%20allocation%20policy%202020.21_final12.pdf> [accessed 12 April 2021] (pgs. 1-2).

³⁶ Royal Holloway University of London, 'Student Accommodation Allocation Policy 2020/21', (pgs. 1-2).

³⁷ Royal Holloway University of London, 'Student Accommodation Allocation Policy 2020/21', (pgs. 3-4).

mentioned, the University reserves a limited number of bed spaces for continuing students with an accommodation guarantee given to those returning from a year studying abroad or undertaking a year in industry. Other guarantees are given to certain groups of continuing students who receive specific scholarships like a Sabbatical Officer, a Chapel Warden, a Halls Duty Officer or Assistant or participated in the Integrated Foundation Year and will return to the University in the autumn as a first-year undergraduate.³⁸

Our conversations with key University stakeholders highlighted that the current application process is complex because it requires students to rank all of the University halls of residence available for their undergraduate or postgraduate status in order of preference under their price band classification rather than hall name and room type. For undergraduates, this list includes 13 halls of residence and, while one of the positives about the available University accommodation is that there is a wide range of choice, students can get confused by the number of price bands and room options offered. There have been instances in the past where a student's 11th choice on their preference list is often better suited to their needs than what they selected as their first choice. There can also be clashes with parents interfering with the application process, and sometimes that influence directs students towards a particular hall of residence that is not right for their child once they settle into their university life. Below are a selection of students' comments about their experience with the online application process for University halls of residence.

Bad system of having to order every single choice - should only have to give top 5 for example + not enough time/communication to accept / decline offers. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Easy but annoying that you have to rank them all as some people just don't want some e.g shared bathroom ones. –Student Housing survey, 2021

For disabled students the application process is very complicated. –Student Housing survey, 2021

I found it easy, yet the wait to find out what I was getting was very tricky, and I feel like it would have been limited if I hadn't have gotten what I needed- so I am grateful I did. I found the layout complex, there was lots of going back and forth from one page to another, which made it hard to remember what I was looking for, selecting and choosing. –Student Housing survey, 2021

It's very straightforward, which is great, but the 'bands' system isn't particularly clear - I think it would be much clearer to organise preferences by the actual name of the specific halls you'd like. It would also be fantastic if continuing students were able to request one friend to be put in a flat / house with. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Despite some of these setbacks, 86 per cent of respondents in our 2021 Student Housing survey said the hall they currently live in was listed in their top three preferences when they applied for University housing. It is really positive to see a large majority of students are getting a hall of their choice, but there are ways the University could update the application process so that it is less confusing for students. The University should consider streamlining the application by reducing the number of halls students rank, and by changing the way room options are labelled in the application. The current system of ranking price bands rather than room types in specific halls is both confusing and, in some cases, potentially misleading. Switching to hall names and room types rather than price bands would manage student

³⁸ Royal Holloway University of London, 'Student Accommodation Allocation Policy 2020/21', (pgs. 1-2).

expectations about the housing options available. One way the University could reduce the preference number is by asking students to rank only five preferences.

We asked students in our 2020 Rate Your Union what importance they placed certain halls features and access to University central services, and whether these options influenced their decision when ranking their preference for University halls of residence. The scale was listed as one (highest priority) to seven (lowest priority), and the table below presents the results. We have highlighted the highest number of response ranking for each feature in blue.

Q15. When making your decision about your Halls of Residence, what importance did you place on the following feature? Please rank from 1 (highest priority) to 7 (lowest priority) in order of decision-making process							
Feature	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	% of respondents						
Facilities (en-suite, kitchen)	35.52	20.48	18.09	11.60	6.83	5.12	1.37
Catered/ Self-catered	18.09	29.01	18.09	11.26	10.24	5.80	7.51
Contract Length	11.95	16.72	21.50	17.06	16.38	7.85	8.53
Price	19.45	12.97	15.70	23.21	14.33	7.85	6.48
Location	9.22	12.63	16.72	21.16	21.18	11.60	6.48
Safety and Security	3.75	6.48	9.22	11.95	23.21	37.54	7.85
Other Wellbeing and Support Services	1.02	1.71	0.68	3.75	6.83	24.23	61.77

Table 3: Halls of residence features, Rate Your Union, 2020

Unsurprisingly, halls facilities like en-suite bathroom, kitchen and communal spaces ranked as the most important factor which influenced a students' preference about available rooms. A large majority of students want an en-suite bathroom, and many consider having to share facilities a deal breaker despite the reduced price that comes with that room option. As mentioned in Section A, this preference towards en-suite is why so many new student developments have mostly en-suite rooms. Below are some free-text responses from students explaining what facilities they considered most important when ranking University halls.

Bed size - I preferred a double bed and space. –Rate Your Union, 2020

En-suite rooms are super important in terms of safety and hygiene. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Facilities like toilet- if it was shared or not. Room space/ double bed or not. How many people I would be sharing a flat with. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Whether new or old building, Single or Double Rooms in the building, Number of rooms in a building. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Things which surprised us were the way students ranked price, safety and security and whether there were wellbeing and support services available, especially as in our later Student Housing survey a large proportion of student complaints about price, safety and security issues were one of the leading reasons for student dissatisfaction with University halls of residence. This will be discussed in further detail later in the report in their relevant sections, but it is important to note that there seems to be a connection with students' expectation of what they think they want in their University halls of residence does not always match up with

their lived experience. For example, there were student respondents in our 2020 Rate Your Union who highlighted that George Eliot seemed like a really social option compared to some of the other accommodation offers during the application process when its actual layout promotes less socialisation than some of the older buildings which have more traditional cluster flats. Other comments in Rate Your Union highlighted that there are students who select their University accommodation largely because of the aesthetics of the building or room option.

Founders is a very nice building so wanted to live there very pretty. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I just wanted to live in a castle my dude, I also just personally don't like the nature of the normal flat & kitchen halls. I don't like that style of forced socialisation and Founders is so much better in that aspect. The common room is a blessing and something that really drew me. –Rate Your Union, 2020

The beauty of the building and I like high ceilings. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Well, I chose Founder's because... it's gorgeous. Honestly that was the extent of my decision making. It also probably helped that it was catered, that was another priority for me. –Rate Your Union 2020

The look of and overall arrangement of the halls - one of the things that made George Eliot really appealing was the idea of living in a house with a big communal area which felt like it would be a very social living environment. I also liked how modern and spacious it was. –Rate Your Union, 2020

In many cases this had no negative effect, but there were instances of regret in the survey where students felt they were misled by appearances.

What the place looked like. (Only chose Founders because it's pretty. Was a big mistake). –Rate Your Union, 2020

The accommodation is very nice and modern. Having said this, we are paying the same amount as other residents of George Eliot and our flat is much smaller. Other flats have extra appliances provided in the kitchen and a dining room table whilst we don't. When I viewed this accommodation I was shown flat with a dining table and the extra appliances so this is what I was expecting. When I moved in and realised our flat didn't have these I was disappointed. –Student Housing survey, 2021

If 'the look' of the rooms on offer is one of the main factors which influences a students' decision about their halls preference, the University should including more visual material about the University halls available. Not only will this make the Accommodation page more engaging for prospective and current students, but it will provide them with more information about the facilities and features of the various price bands on offer. One way this could be achieved is by including 360 degree photos of rooms on the University Accommodation webpage which showcase the various price bands in each hall and includes their location on a University map. Moreover, updating the current presentation of halls on the University website would make it more accessible to students who are unable to visit campus on open days, and it would additionally help manage students' expectations about the University housing options available.

One thing students highlighted they felt was missing from the University halls application process was personality questions. Many respondents believe this would give them a better match with roommate or flatmates and would hopefully reduce conflict in their halls of

residence. In our discussion with University stakeholders we learned that flatmate disputes were one of the most common issues the University Student Wellbeing team deals with for students living in University halls of residence and the private sector, and this was reiterated in both surveys. We asked students what would they change about their halls of residence, and a repeated response in both surveys was a request for the inclusion of personality questions in the online application. Below are some examples of student responses explaining their current living situation with their roommate and flatmates, as well as requests for personality questions to be included in the application.

I did not want to be in a single sex flat which is what we ended up with. Furthermore with hugely different personalities and interests in the flat we often clashed which sometimes made for an uncomfortable living situation. Perhaps flatmates should be 'personality tested' eg do they like going out? If they do then put them with like-minded people. Also mature students (23 years old) shouldn't be put with 18 year olds who clearly have different interests to them. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I had the worst experience with one of my housemates who was consistently loud, gross, and at least twice a week blocked the shared toilet in the house, rendering the bathroom unusable. When I complained about this multiple times to Student Services, to Hall Life and even to the manager of Hall Life (who the SU advice centre put me in contact with), I was constantly told to "talk to him" about the issue as if we hadn't already done so and that it had done anything. Furthermore, I experienced homophobic discrimination from another of the housemates, and when I complained about it, I was told nothing could be done "without evidence", as if evidence of being verbally discriminated against was easy to retrieve. My mental health was so impacted by this living situation and the fact that the university didn't really do anything to help, I ended up moving out and going to Highfield for a little less than a month before I had to move back home because of the pandemic. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I was really pleased with the facilities but it would have been nice to have been put with people more similar as I know some unis do personality quizzes to match people as my flat never ate together or anything which was sad. –Rate Your Union, 2020

It would probably be too hard but were it possible to be placed based on interest and general personality that would have been amazing. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Halls chosen by personality test (e.g. what Southampton Uni does). –Rate Your Union, 2020

My flatmates are nothing like me, frequently broke gov and uni covid regulations, and were extremely unhygienic in the kitchen. I was feeling lonely, isolated and anxious most days living there, even though living on campus is my best option academically. The configuration of the GE houses means it's hard to get to know people not on your floor or get hold of someone so house communication was extremely poor. –Student Housing survey, 2021

*I was placed in a house with people who have conflicting personality types to mine: I'm quiet, clean, reserved, and value peace and quiet, whereas they're all party-goers who drink every night and leave a huge amount of mess around. I also have OCD, so being placed in a house with people who leave the kitchen in such a horrific state to the point where I feel mentally distressed if I leave my bedroom is a little upsetting. Don't get me wrong: they're lovely people, just they do things *very* differently to me, so much so that they've found it too hard to accommodate to my needs (while I've told them about my OCD etc. and they've said they'd be cleaner, nothing really changed). I think a*

rather good solution to this would be to add an optional personality test to the accommodation application process. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Add a personality quiz to the accommodation application to aggregate complimentary personality types into houses. I literally feel completely alone in this house, not having been able to make any friends after a term and a half of living here. It's just depressing. –Student Housing survey, 2021

The current software used by the University does not allow for the inclusion of personality questions in the application process and allocation policy. The University should review the current software used for halls applications and decide whether it is fit for purpose. If it is decided that a change in software needs to occur, the University should additionally review its allocation process. It is understood that this could take time to develop and implement

While students suggested personality quizzes, there is another option to help reduce roommate and flatmate conflict in University halls of residence. Over the last few years, 'significantly more institutions offer alcohol-free, quiet and single-sex accommodation' with an aim to improve students' wellbeing needs in university and private halls of residence.³⁹ We asked students in both of our surveys whether they were interested in the introduction of lifestyle flats and the tables below present students' responses.

Q17. If the following options had been available as a matching filter at the point of applying for halls, would you have used them? Please tick all that apply	
Lifestyle Option	% of respondents
Quiet Halls	31.06
Alcohol Free	11.60
Other	7.17
None of the above	63.14

Table 4: Lifestyle flats, Rate Your Union, 2020

Q7. If the following options had been available as a matching filter at any point of applying for halls, would you have used them?		
Room Option	Yes % of respondents	No % of respondents
Single Sex	20	80
Alcohol Free	25.83	74.17
Quiet Halls	54.17	45.83
Vegetarian/Vegan	15.83	84.17
LGBTQ+	27.50	72.50

Table 5: Lifestyle flats, Student Housing survey, 2021

Of the options we listed for student respondents, there is student interest in single sex, alcohol free, quiet halls and LGBTQ+ flats. The University should undertake a review which types of lifestyle halls would be best suited to the Royal Holloway community, and following this audit they should trial the introduction of lifestyle flats. Once approved, lifestyle halls would be a part of the halls application process and be distributed on a first-come-first-serve basis or on a recommendation from a member of the University's professional services like Wellbeing or DDS. It is important that, once included, lifestyle halls are not filled by students looking for a University halls place who have not selected one of the above features. The introduction of lifestyle halls has the potential to minimize roommate conflict and positively impact students' feelings about safety on campus. It is understood this would require time to develop and implement.

³⁹ National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (pg. 12).

C3. Looking for housing: the private sector

Due to the University allocation policy, the majority of continuing students in their second and third years live in private housing in the wider community around Royal Holloway. We asked students in both surveys to list which area they resided in, and the table below presents these results.

Rate Your Union, 2020		Student Housing survey, 2021	
Location	% of respondents	Location	% of respondents
Egham	42.70	Egham	42.42
Englefield Green	47.45	Englefield Green	42.42
Staines	1.09	Staines	4.04
Other	8.76	Other	11.11

Table 6: Student rentals in the local area, Rate Your Union, 2020, and Student Housing survey, 2021

Egham and Englefield Green are the two areas closest to the University and the majority of Royal Holloway students who live in private housing reside in these areas because of their close proximity to the University. Some of the 'Other' locations listed in the survey indicated the respondents were most likely commuter students living in areas further away like Camberley, London, Hampton, Hounslow, Kent, Kingston, Richmond and West Sussex.

We asked students in our 2020 Rate Your Union to explain what influenced their decision on their final housing choice. Recurring answers were cheaper accommodation, proximity to the University, being able to live with friends and house features like a garden, access to parking or double rooms. Below are some samples of students' responses.

Location, size, cleanliness, cost - as a group we wanted to live in Englefield Green instead of Egham, we were not fussed about double/single rooms but wanted communal space to be able to live in, the state of the house was really important, and we jumped at the opportunity of a property being bills included. –Rate Your Union, 2020

We were looking for a few specific amenities (eg parking), but proximity to the College was what sealed the deal for us (even if that meant a slightly higher cost). –Rate Your Union, 2020

I had an offer for Penrose, but I decided to rent a room in the private sector because there were not many details about this particular hall on the internet and I wanted to have an en-suite room. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Bills being included and it being a generally nice house. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Contract duration and cheaper cost. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Availability of student halls - was offered a place but my friend wasn't. Ultimately decided to live with her in private accommodation. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I lived with friends from the same degree course, in order to focus on my final year. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I would have stayed in uni accommodation if I had the choice but first years are prioritised. –Rate Your Union, 2020

It was mainly out of fear that we wouldn't find somewhere, so we settled pretty quickly for a sub-optimal house. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Before the pandemic, it was common practice for student tenants in the UK to begin looking for their rental properties as early as Term One for the *next* academic year. In the 2018 survey for the ongoing NUS *Homes Fit for Study* series, student respondents indicated they began looking this early because of ‘pressure from their peers and concern that there would be no properties available if they left it any later’.⁴⁰ This was very much common practice for Royal Holloway students pre-pandemic, and our Students’ Union Advice Centre would receive enquiries from students about contract checks and securing housing for the next academic year as early as November.⁴¹ Because students were feeling pressured to find housing so early, the Students’ Union ran our annual Housing Fair towards the end of November and invited local agents and landlords to advertise their property. Our Housing Advisor would also offer students free contract checks if they found a property they were interested in. That service runs throughout the academic year and students can book an appointment at any point they find a rental property they want to secure.

Since the pandemic, there has been a shift away from the previous trend of signing a tenancy agreement by the end of Term One, and one landlord in our Private Housing survey commented that ‘the timing for when students normally inquire has changed dramatically’. Whether this is a permanent change in the student rental market has yet to be decided, but the last year of repeated lockdowns has forced students to question whether they want to commit to a year-long contract while the UK has yet to completely lift all lockdown restrictions. We asked students in our 2021 Student Housing survey how far in advance they signed contracts for their current property, and the table below presents the results of that question.

Q20. How far in advance did you sign your contract before moving in?	
Time Period	% of respondents
More than a year	3
9-12 months	17
6-9 months	28
3-6 months	19
Less than 3 months	33

Table 7: Securing housing in the private sector, Student Housing survey, 2021

Despite the reduced pressure of having to sign a tenancy agreement, 36 per cent of survey respondents in our Student Housing survey stated they had difficulties with securing private housing. One of the negatives of having to secure housing in the private sector is the expensive start-up costs once a student signs a tenancy agreement with deposits, first months’ rent and high rent advances if students do not have a UK guarantor. This will be discussed in more detail in the affordability section of the report. Other recurrent reasons besides costs were a lack of single person tenancy agreements, no available properties, poor communication from estate agents and landlords, inability to find flatmates, house disrepair and COVID. Below are examples of student responses which highlight their struggle to secure private housing in the wider area surrounding Royal Holloway.

I started looking a bit late in 2019, so it was difficult to find housing. Most of the houses were unsuitable. –Student Housing survey, 2021

⁴⁰ National Union of Students, *Homes Fit for Study*, 3rd edn, (pg. 7).

⁴¹ Royal Holloway Students’ Union, ‘Students Pressured into Renewing Contract’, *Royal Holloway Students’ Union*, 13 November 2019 <<https://www.su.rhul.ac.uk/news/article/surhul/Students-Pressured-Into-Renewing-Housing-Contract/>> [accessed 10 March 2021].

We had secured another property with [name redacted] which was deemed unsafe by environmental health. We were left with extremely limited choice. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Pressure to sign due to other groups viewing at the same time—high competition for good quality housing. Was also hard as a PGR students to get a property contract which worked for us. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Transparency of postings on internet- houses often let agreed already. Viewings cancelled at short notice. –Student Housing survey, 2021

We lost a house which we had put a holding deposit down for in March and had to find another house (the one we have now) in June/July which was not ideal however turned out for the best! –Student Housing survey, 2021

Two housemates dropped out in the process for a 4 person house. We signed the contract less than a month before we moved in. –Student Housing survey, 2021

The Students' Union formerly ran an online platform where approved landlords advertised their properties if they met a minimum standards requirement. In 2021 we transferred the running of this service over to Student Pad, and they have agreed to continue this policy. 43.72 per cent of respondents in our Student Housing Survey have used HouseSearch in the past to secure properties, but only 11.25 per cent of those respondents ended up signing a contract with a property on HouseSearch. This is a consequence of an oversaturation of houses near the University and many do not meet the required standards to advertise on HouseSearch. It is unfortunately common that students are sometimes forced to accept whatever property is available regardless of its condition.

We asked students what support they would like when moving into the private sector, and there were recurring responses about getting more information about their rights as tenants, contract checks, education material about the financial aspect of renting, more help for international students and help finding housemates. Below are a sample of student responses which highlight the type of support they need in this area of the student experience.

As an international student the early days were complicated as I didn't know how things worked around here and had to self-isolate so it was expensive not to starve. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Guide's explaining how the finance side works [billing, how rent works, deposits, etc..] Resources informing where you can look for private accommodation. Maybe stuff saying what you should and shouldn't be looking for/what to avoid. –Student Housing survey, 2021

The SU/Uni could create a helpful guide of moving into private housing like they did when we moved into halls for residence. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Information on where to start: where to look for a house; how to set a budget; what you need to know about bills and rent; what you should look out for. –Student Housing survey, 2021

The Students' Union Advice Centre already offers many of these services and 61.96 per cent of survey respondents in our Student Housing service knew the SU Advice Centre provides housing support, but only 25.54 per cent of respondents indicated they have used the SU Advice Centre for housing queries. In a bid to increase student awareness and use of our services, the Students' Union should give the Housing Rights blog series a more permanent

place on our webpage and ensure it is easily accessible for students to find this information. The Students' Union Advice Centre should also consider recording three short videos explaining in brief the services offered at the Advice Centre for each stage of the student private housing lifecycle: Looking, Living and Leaving. All three of these videos could discuss the financial elements involved with each stage of the private housing cycle which could better inform students about the issue. These recordings offer another medium to relay information, and the videos could be promoted on social media to time with important dates in the year. The Students' Union Advice Centre should also have regular reviews of their communications plan around housing blogs and articles which are sent out to students, agents and landlords to ensure messaging is clear, appropriate and up-to-date. And, finally, the Students' Union should continue to investigate ways to have a successful working relationship with landlords and estate agents in the local area so that Royal Holloway students have the best possible private housing options available to them in the wider community around the University. Finally, The University Halls Life team should continue to work closely with the Students' Union Advice Centre and circulate information in their newsletters and on the Royal Holloway App about the Students' Union HouseMating service which helps students find housemates as they transition out of University halls to the private sector. This has been a successful service, especially with students who struggled to form friendship groups this year during the pandemic.

C3. Affordability: University and private halls of residence

The NUS and Unipol report, *Accommodation Costs Survey* (2018), explains that for the 2018-19 academic year, a London institution's rent is deemed affordable under the terms of the New London Plan if it does not exceed £6,244.70 for UK home students.⁴² The survey results revealed that 56 per cent of university rooms are offered to students 'for less than £7,000 and 40 per cent for less than £6,000'.⁴³ Royal Holloway was mentioned as one member institution from the University of London which offered 'almost all of their stock inside the affordability cap' which asks institutions to have 35 per cent of bedrooms priced at a rent no higher than 55 per cent of the Maintenance Loan.⁴⁴ It needs to be acknowledged that, in comparison to many London universities, Royal Holloway does stand out with their offer of more affordable accommodation, but there is still further work to be done in this area.

In our 2020 Rate Your Union we asked respondents who live in university halls of residence, private purpose-build student halls and private rentals in the wider area whether they consider their accommodation to be good value for money. In next two sections we will discuss all three housing options. The table below presents the results for University and private halls of residence.

⁴² National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (pg. 43).

⁴³ National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (pg. 43).

⁴⁴ National Union of Students and Unipol, *Accommodation Costs Survey*, (pg. 43).

University and Private Halls	% of respondents						
	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree
Q3. I consider my accommodation to be good value for money	18.09	32.76	19.11	4.10	9.90	7.51	8.53

Table 8: University and private halls value for money, Rate Your Union, 2020

69.96 per cent of survey respondents who lived in University halls of residences or private purpose-built halls agreed with this statement to some extent, with 50.85 per cent of respondents agreeing within the top two categories. When we asked students in the survey to explain their answers we received mixed responses in regards to their satisfaction rating. Below are a selection which reflect the spectrum of student opinion from this section of the survey.

Accommodation is expensive but I was really pleased with the facilities that I had this year. I had a couple of issues to report to reception and were dealt with fairly quickly. –Rate Your Union, 2020.

Founders was an interesting place to live. My roommate wasn't the best so really distorted my time in accommodation. Founders was good for the most part but a little inconsistent with the price of the room for what you are actually getting. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I have loved living in Founders this year - a unique opportunity to live in such a grand building with all its quirks. Food has been delicious and the reception staff are very friendly and helpful. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Both the Podium and the Pad are incredibly overpriced considering what they offer in terms of rooms and facilities. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Kingswood is the best accommodation ever. I had my worries at the beginning but I am extremely satisfied with my experience there. This is the most social accommodation, which suited me and what I was looking for. In terms of money, I think it can be a bit cheaper, considering it isn't exactly in the main campus and the bathrooms are smaller than a normal one. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Regarding its value for money I believe that Founders is a bit expensive. The communal areas weren't to the standard I felt I was paying for. I understand the age of the building increases the cost but the communal areas at times weren't cleaned well or were in a poor condition. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Price is excessive, but it provides a service with friends and good social activities. –Rate Your Union, 2020.

I loved living in halls. Any reported fault was quickly dealt with. Halls were expensive but worth it for the amount of fun I had. Also loved the en suite. –Rate Your Union, 2020

The issues with the building that I raised were dealt with after weeks of the halls first being notified and these issues seriously affected my living situation. –Rate Your Union, 2020

My main motivating factor for choosing to live in halls for my 1st Year is because of the fact that although I'm a British National, I'm an Overseas student moving to the UK. Having the accommodation provided on campus meant that it was one less thing to worry about for me, and the bills are all included which is a plus, however, I do think that the prices are a bit more on the expensive side. –Rate Your Union, 2020

From the responses, it is clear that a variety of factors go into what's classified as good value for money—cost, room facilities, opportunities to socialise with other students, central service responses to issues, student status—and respondents indicated in their answers how these aspects contribute towards their individual perception of their University accommodation's value for money. Of the answers submitted, the most repeated comments we received in the survey about University accommodation did relate to cost, flatmate relations and the University's response to disrepair.

While we originally asked students whether they felt their accommodation was good value for money in our 2020 Rate Your Union, we did not repeat the question in our 2021 Student Housing survey. We made this decision because the UK was still in the middle of its third lockdown and many students had returned home to family for the December holiday period. In January, the government announced only a small portion of students would be allowed to return to campus and, while some students may have already returned before the announcement, the majority of students were told to stay home. Students were able to apply for rent rebates from the University while the survey ran, however, we felt the government guidelines would have negatively skewed the results of this question, especially when it came to private housing as many landlords did not offer students financial reprieves during lockdown periods. Despite not asking students whether they felt their University accommodation was good value for money, we did want to know their opinion on the available price bands. 60.17 per cent of respondents answered that they felt there is a wide range of price bands at Royal Holloway. We asked students to explain their answers and below are a sample of responses.

Majority of cheap ones are catered which is not ideal.—Student Housing survey, 2021

Whilst there's a lot of accommodation available for the most part it is on the more expensive side of the scale and therefore options can feel quite limited. –Student Housing survey, 2021

There were some that were definitely too expensive for me, and one or two that were "too cheap", which I think is a good indication that there's a range of prices. –Student Housing survey, 2021

There is cheap and expensive rooms, moderate prices are not that common. –Student Housing survey, 2021

There is a wide range of room price bands available, but I do not think that the prices reflect the quality of accommodation. –Student Housing survey, 2021

There is a few price bands of rooms but they are all around the same price, and there is not much difference between them. There is also only 2 contract durations which was an issue when confirming. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Average contract length for university halls of residence across institutions in the UK is 40 weeks, and all but two of Royal Holloway's undergraduate price bands are below this average

at 38 weeks. Moreover, the lower-cost price bands currently available at Royal Holloway often come with the condition of either being catered accommodation with food costs not included in their halls fees, they are located far away from campus or offered on a 30 week contract length which requires students move their belongings into storage or back home at the end of every term. In the higher education era of value for money all of these options have the potential to negatively impact the Royal Holloway student experience. One example of how Royal Holloway has previously addressed the issue of affordability is seen with the changes they made to the contract length for one of their halls of residences, Founders. Founders is made up of both single and shared rooms, and used to fall under the reduced 30 week contract length. The University made the decision in the 2019-20 academic year to increase the let length to the standard Royal Holloway undergraduate period of 38 weeks with a minimal increase in price. This is a positive example of making accommodation more affordable for Royal Holloway students, and offering a positive change to their overall student experience by removing the previous stress of having to move out at the end of each academic term.

For the 2020-21 academic year the maximum Maintenance Loan amount offered to students studying in London and living outside the family home was £12,010. In order for London universities to fall under the requirements of the New London plan they would need to offer bedrooms at a rent of £6,605 if they were given the full amount of the London Maintenance Loan to have money left over to pay for other living costs like food regardless of whether they are living in catered or self-catered accommodation. Save the Student found in their 2021 National Student Accommodation survey that 50 per cent of respondents in University halls, private purpose built accommodation and the private sector struggle to keep up with their rent payments which has a negative impact on other areas of their lives. 60 per cent of respondents mentioned their health has suffered because of their accommodation costs and 45 per cent of respondents indicated their studying was negatively impacted.⁴⁵ As mentioned earlier, students are not guaranteed to receive the full amount, and students in both our 2020 Rate Your Union and our 2021 Student Housing survey revealed that this was an issue when applying for University accommodation.

Make Runnymede 1 and 2 the same quality or change the pricing - overall cheaper halls because maintenance loans do not cover a lot of the time or extra funding support. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Price reduction as my maintenance loan did not cover the price. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Everything is very expensive; the price of most accommodation is more than students receive in maintenance loan. –Student Housing survey, 2021

There is a reasonably wide range of price bands, although some are relatively expensive compared to the value of maintenance loans.—Student Housing survey, 2021

They are all very expensive and well above what I can afford on my student loan. This has meant I've had to travel home at weekends in order to keep my job- when I asked the university for support with my travel by allowing me to park on campus (so I can easily travel home each weekend) they refused. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Because students are not guaranteed to receive the full London Maintenance Loan while studying at Royal Holloway, the University should offer a portion of their accommodation at a rent below the 55 per cent reduction presented in the New London Plan which, as mentioned,

⁴⁵ Laura Brown, 'National Student Accommodation Survey 2021'.

currently stands at £6,605 per annum. For the 2020-21 academic year eight out of 14 halls price bands at Royal Holloway fell under this amount. It needs to be noted that all of the reduced price bands are offered for two weeks less than the national let average of 40 weeks, and two of these bands—Band F and Band H1—would actually be priced above the New London Plan requirements if they were offered on the average 40 week contract length. This begs the question of whether they should even be classified as budget accommodation when you compare the weekly rate for these rooms. The table below presents the Royal Holloway undergraduate price bands which fall into the affordable requirements of the New London Plan for the 2020-21 academic year.

Undergraduate Hall Bands		Let type (weeks)	Room type	Catering	Total price	Weekly price (approx.)
Single en suite Band C	Kingswood 2	38	Single en suite	Catered Pay-as-you-go	£5,777.00	£153
Single standard Band E1	Kingswood 1	30	Single with washbasin	Catered Pay-as-you-go	£3,574	£120
Single standard Band E2	Kingswood 1	38	Single with washbasin	Catered Pay-as-you-go	£4,576.55	£121
Single en suite Band F	Tuke F (limited availability)	30	Single en suite	Self-catered	£5,721.48	£191
Single en suite Band H1	Reid	30	Single en suite	Catered Pay-as-you-go	£5,222.61	£175
Single en suite Band J	Founder's	38	Single en suite	Catered Pay-as-you-go	£6,259.30-£6,341.45	£165-167
Shared standard Band L	Founder's	38	Shared/Shared with washbasin	Catered Pay-as-you-go	£4,833.60-£5,019.10	£128-£133

Table 9: Undergraduate Halls Fees 2020/21, Royal Holloway University of London

As discussed many of these reduced fares come at the cost of being catered accommodation, a reduced contract length of 30 weeks or are located quite far from the main Royal Holloway campus in Egham. These are the primary critiques students had about their accommodation in both our 2020 Rate Your Union and our 2021 Student Housing survey.

Reid has been designed based on successful prison layouts, it would seem. The building fosters bad relations in the very place that students expect to make loads of friends: their accommodation. The 30 week contracts are good value for money, but a hideous inconvenience. – Rate Your Union, 2020

Founders is wonderful and the people I lived with are amazing, the facilities are reasonable and the room is a really great size. That said, I'm paying £162 a week, that's nearly £650 A MONTH for a single room and to share a bathroom and pantry with about 40 other people. On top of that the 50% discount makes no difference when the food is hideously priced to begin with and I still end up paying nearly £20 A WEEK for two meals a day! –Rate Your Union, 2020

Founders is too expensive for what you get, the food is awful and we shouldn't have to pay extra for it, the facilities i.e. toilets are unhygienic and there is too many people for them. –Student Housing survey, 2021

The price is too high for no kitchen and no catering being covered in rent. Kingswood is very isolated from the rest of the school. There is no socialising areas in halls so it's difficult to make friends or even to get to know your own flatmates. –Student Housing survey, 2021.

Majority of cheap ones are catered which is not ideal. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Paying rent for any accommodation is and would be a struggle for me, especially considering you can get private accommodation in the area for less than 100 pounds a week with bills. And as I live in Kingswood I don't have access to a proper kitchen so I have to pay to eat in the canteen every day because even though its catered accommodation, the catering is not covered in the 180 pounds a week, which is completely ridiculous in my opinion. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Stop putting the prices up. It is ridiculous that we pay basically 7000 for a 38 week let. When you can get houses with bills included for way less than 6000 for 44-48 week lets that have way more facilities than what the university offers. It feels like you are capitalising on the fact that some students are in need of living within walking distance to campus facilities and this is sad. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Many Royal Holloway students choose lower-cost price bands based on the amount they receive from their Maintenance Loan. There is an understanding that they will not be equal in layout and facilities to the higher cost rooms on offer. There is an assumption that lower-cost accommodation will be older halls of residence and have shared facilities, however, there is clear need for more self-catered budget rooms made available on the main Egham campus which fall under the standard University contract length of 38 weeks at a minimum. There is a real potential to include more affordable accommodation which fulfils the above categories with the construction of the new University halls development, Rusham Park. The University has agreed a deal with the developer that 20 per cent of the rooms will be budget en-suite and self-catered rooms with a 40 week contract period. Moreover, there will be adapted rooms available at every price point for students who require those rooms. This is a really positive and inclusive step towards offering students a wider range of accommodation types on campus. The eventual loss of Kingswood in the coming years, however, will significantly decrease the number of lower-cost room options available for Royal Holloway students, and the University should review the current price bands in their older halls of residence to see whether any of them could be reduced and offered to students on a more budgeted rate.

In addition to examining their affordable halls of residence options, the University should be more transparent about the financial distribution of University halls fees. The creation of education material which explains how cleaning, utilities, service contracts, maintenance and repairs are taken from University halls fees would help manage student expectations about their fees and better educate them about where their money goes. For example, it takes a huge financial investment to maintain the infrastructure to keep the University halls of residence fit for purpose and running each academic year. Transparency around the fee distribution would also help explain why the University charges different amounts for halls' fees each academic term. Another area to examine is the halls of residence breakdown fees across each term. The largest proportion of accommodation costs are asked to paid in Term One when students receive the smallest amount of their Maintenance Loan while the smallest cost occurs in Term Three when students receive their largest payment for their Maintenance

Loan. Education material which explains this fee distribution would help manage student expectations about paying their fees. This information should be signposted clearly on the Accommodation webpage. The breakdown of halls income and expenditure could be presented as an infographic in a similar vein to the financial breakdown currently on the University webpage.

Finally, there is a crossover between affordability and sustainability. In February 2020, the University Council declared a climate emergency and discussed potential directions the University could take to become more sustainable. One of these suggestions was to 'design and maintain new buildings to reduce environmental impact' as well as to raise more 'awareness of the environmental impact of all our activities including transport'.⁴⁶ The University Council discussed potential sustainability initiatives like trailing the use of non-hazardous cleaning products and building renovations like installing cavity wall and loft insulation in some of the older halls of residence like Highfield.⁴⁷ The installation of SMART technology in University halls of residence is another pathway to consider. Some higher education institutes like the University of Bristol have already incorporated new technology into their halls. It's common for rooms in University halls of residence to be heated at the same level regardless of whether students are in their rooms. This, naturally, can be a great source of waste, especially as student preferences towards room temperatures can vary, and it is quite common for students to open windows if overheated which contributes to further waste. The University of Bristol has introduced a new electronic radiator valve which has an inbuilt thermostat and timer which allows students to self-regulate their room which allows for additional heat for short intervals or switching it off completely. Heating in their halls of residence is also provided at 'different background levels appropriate to day and night' and 'the room is never allowed to become so cold as to have an unacceptable warm up time'.⁴⁸ The introduction of this electronic radiator valve has subsequently saved about 200 tonnes of CO₂ a year, and been met received positively by Bristol students.

The University has real potential with the new development, Rusham Park, to introduce similar sustainability options for students through SMART technology. The University should discuss with the service provider whether integration of SMART technology is possible in a set number of flats, or all flats at Rusham Park. This would allow students the opportunity to be more environmentally sustainable and have control over their utility usage with the added aim to earn money back if their expenses are lower than the expected cost to run. This will additionally help students to be better prepared for life in the private sector when they are responsible for paying their own utility bills.

C4. Affordability: Private housing

In our 2020 Rate Your Union survey, we asked students who lived in private housing in the wider area around the University whether they considered their accommodation to be good value for money. Overall, 62.77 per cent of respondents who live in private housing agreed with this statement to some extent, with 44.16 per cent of respondents within the top two categories. Both of these figures were below the satisfaction average of students who live in University or private halls, which suggests students consider halls to be better value for money

⁴⁶ Dr David Haygarth, Jonathan Main and Manish Shah, 'Sustainability on Campus: Presentation to Council', 28 February 2019, <<https://royalhollowayucu.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/council-sustainability-presentation-21feb19-v4.pptx>> [accessed 11 May 2021] (pg. 4).

⁴⁷ Dr David Haygarth, Jonathan Main and Manish Shah, 'Sustainability on Campus: Presentation to Council', (pg. 20).

⁴⁸ University of Bristol, 'Smart heating for student halls', *University of Bristol* <<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/green/doing/our-achievements/smart-heating-for-student-halls/>> [accessed 10 May 2021]

than private housing in the local area. The table below presents the results for this question in full.

Private Housing	% of respondents						
	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree
Q10. I consider my accommodation to be good value for money	25.55	18.61	18.61	5.84	12.04	10.58	8.76

Table 10: 'I consider my accommodation to be good value for money, Rate Your Union, 2020

When we asked students to explain their satisfaction rating, many students raised similar issues to students living in halls—cost was a huge factor as was location. However, there were also differences in their responses, for example, many returning students wanted to live with friends they had made the previous years and private housing was the only option where they could do that. In other instances, students were forced into the decision because they did not get a halls place as a continuing student. Finally, there was a recurrent theme that the lack of central services found in University halls accommodation had a negative impact on their living experience because they lacked access to certain professional and central service teams like Hall Life, Halls Reception, Cleaning, Maintenance and Security. Students who responded positively about their private accommodation's value for money often cited location, parking, access to a garden and regular communication from the landlord and estate agent. Below are a selection of students' responses presenting their perception of private housing value for money in the wider area surrounding Royal Holloway.

I was lucky enough to find a couple who let a couple of houses around the area. They were literally like my mum and dad - always at the other end of the phone when there were issues with the house. They would pop by from time to time to clear the gardens and the outside of the house. They were also kind enough to pay a little towards our bills during the lockdown. –Rate Your Union, 2020

We got extremely lucky! Our landlord is lovely and she responds to any queries/problems we have extremely quickly, and the house itself is great value for money. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I am satisfied with the accommodation I received for the money I spent. However I am not satisfied with the landlord of the property. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I think the private housing options are very expensive but this is standard for all houses. Once bills is factored in on top of rent it becomes very expensive I didn't realise how expensive it would be during in my first year. We were lucky in that we had a very good landlord and he was always on hand to help. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Accommodation was a 15min walk to campus and by the station, very spacious and easy to work at home. Quite pricey, only some issues with the washing machine and shower but we were able to communicate and sort out these issues with the agency. –Rate Your Union, 2020

The rent is very expensive for what it is, and the landlord does the bare minimum. If asked to fix something or do any household maintenance, he will send a handyman

with no prior warning, who will often let himself in without our knowledge. It is very unsettling, and I do not believe it to be too big an ask for us to be given a window of time so that we can be fully clothed and prepared for a stranger to be in our home. – Rate Your Union, 2020

The house is cheap which is great. However, the kitchen is too small and its obvious that there shouldn't be this many rooms in this house. Also, Englefield is too far from town, the uni and the train station. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Upon reading students' comments about their private housing experience, we wanted to get a better understanding what rents were like in the area surrounding Royal Holloway. We ran a Private Housing survey in February 2021 for local landlords and estate agents, and we questioned them about their rent charges. 35 private landlords and seven estate agents participated in this survey and the table below presents the monthly rent ranges for properties close to the University. The numbers presented reflect the monthly and weekly rent charge per person (pp).

Number of bedrooms	Monthly rent range pp	Weekly rent range pp (52 weeks)
One bedroom	£224-1000	£51-£230
Two bedrooms	£500-750	£115-173
Three bedrooms	£483-833	£111-192
Four bedrooms	£337.50-812.50	£77-187.50
Five bedrooms	£320-800	£73-184
Six bedrooms	£470-550	£108-£126
Seven bedrooms	£457	£105
8 bedrooms	£412.50	£95

Table 11: Average rental prices in the local area around Royal Holloway, Landlord and Estate Agent survey, 2021

From a purely financial perception, rental properties in the wider area around Royal Holloway are significantly cheaper on a weekly rental rate for a longer period of time than the lower-cost University and private halls accommodation. Royal Holloway is a member institution of the University of London and is located in the South East, and rent rates are higher here than the rest of the UK. The landlords and estate agents who provided information revealed rental rates around the University fall in a range that is both below and above the national average of £146 per week as noted in Save the Student's annual National Student Accommodation survey for 2021.⁴⁹ As discussed earlier, students lose out on the University accommodation central service provisions, are often living in accommodation that is not to the same standard as University or private halls of residences and are usually living away from the main Egham campus. Student respondents in both of 2020 Rate Your Union and 2021 Student Housing survey tended to discuss in their free text responses social or housemate issues, disrepair and, finally, landlord and estate agent satisfaction rather than the financial cost of living there. When issues surrounding their living expenses were raised in the survey, students tended to discuss how they have had learn to manage their finances, flatmate disputes about splitting rent and bills or their landlord refusing to offer some form of rent relief during the pandemic.

For a further glimpse of the costs associated with living in private rentals surrounding the University, the subsequent tables presents the results from additional questions we asked in

⁴⁹ Laura Brown, 'National Student Accommodation Survey 2021'.

our Private Housing survey around security deposits, paying first months' rent and their policy around guarantors and additional instalments.

Q14. At what point are students expected to pay for the security deposit?	
Answers	% of respondents
At signing	56.25
Later	43.75
Q15. At what point are students expected to pay for the first month's rent?	
Answers	% of respondents
At signing	23.53
Later	76.47
Q17. If a student does not have a guarantor do you ask the student tenant for a larger advance in rent?	
Answers	% of respondents
Yes	67.65
No	32.35
Q19. Do you offer tenancies shorter than 12 months?	
Answers	% of respondents
Yes	38.24
No	61.76
Q20. Do you offer reduced rent during the summer period?	
Answers	% of respondents
Yes	8.82
No	91.18

Table 12: Additional financials for private housing near Royal Holloway, Private Housing survey, 2021

Legally, security deposits are a maximum five weeks' rent, and many survey respondents indicated they accept payment from students at any point from signing to the start date on an individual basis. Only 14 per cent of survey respondents stated they used zero-deposit schemes like Reposit, which legally protects a students' security deposit at the end of a tenancy agreement. In the past, landlords have delayed returning students deposit months after a tenancy agreement has ended with deductions. In our Private Housing survey, however, 94.29 per cent of respondents indicated they return a students' deposit—with or without deductions—less than one month after they have moved out. Landlords and estate agents gave mixed responses in regards to when they would demand first months' rent, and this is likely a consequence of understanding the student rental market and knowing many students sign a new contract long before their tenancy agreement with their current property is finished. Even with these delayed payments, student respondents in the survey cited difficulties securing properties because their Maintenance Loan did not cover the rent.

Finding one between £300-350 was difficult, being a student I couldn't afford more than that. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Affording rent and bills which is way over three quarters of our student loans.—Student Housing survey, 2021

It is very difficult (if not impossible) to rent a house without guarantors since maintenance loans do not count towards your income. Luckily our family could help. –Rate Your Union, 2020

Some landlords make their properties more appealing and affordable by offering shorter tenancy agreements, however, this was in a small percentage and were offered for 10 or 11

month tenancy agreements. There was one instance in the survey where the landlord offered a contract for six months.

A lack of UK guarantor is one area in the private housing sector that is costly for student renters, especially for International and EU students. 67.65 per cent of survey respondents in our Private Housing survey indicated they ask for advance rent instalments if students' lack a UK guarantor. Below are a selection of landlord and estate agent responses from the survey which reveal how much this requirement can cost their student tenants.

We ask for six months' rent in advance and the second six months is due on month four into the tenancy. –Private Housing survey, 2021

Six months in advance for the first month and the second in the fifth month. –Private Housing survey, 2021

Three months in advance each quarter. –Private Housing survey, 2021

International students pay six months. –Private Housing survey, 2021

Additional three months before occupation, no rent payable for last three hence always three months in advance. –Private Housing survey, 2021

We ask for 3-monthly instalments but are happy to flex with loan payment timings. Generally try to be as flexible as possible but ask that communication for delays is in advance in writing. –Private Housing survey, 2021

UK students who are eligible for a Maintenance Loan receive their loan in three instalments at the start of every term. For UK students who do not have a guarantor, advance payments like this can have a huge impact on the amount of loan they have leftover to put towards other living expenses like utilities and food each term. As mentioned, International and EU students are not eligible to receive the UK Maintenance Loan and will most likely to lack a UK guarantor. Consequently, they are forced to pay for these advance instalments from their own funds. It is perhaps this reason why so many International and EU students look at private purpose-built student halls because they do not require a guarantor and can pay on a monthly rate which can improve their overall student experience. The University is currently in the process of implementing a guarantor scheme for Royal Holloway students and, once in place, it has the potential to significantly improve students' overall higher education experience by removing the financial pressure to pay large and advanced rent instalments if they lack a guarantor for private housing. This will also be extremely helpful to Home students who are care leavers and are financially disadvantaged as well as International and EU students who lack access to the Maintenance Loan and a UK guarantor.

While the Students' Union and the University have little influence over the private sector and a landlord's decisions about guarantors and rent payments, there are steps the Students' Union Advice Centre can take to better educate students about financial matters like budgeting and their rights which was discussed in our previous section.

C5. Student wellbeing, safety and security while studying at Royal Holloways

As mentioned in Section A, conversations around student wellbeing and their living situations have increased in recent years. In our discussion with University stakeholders throughout Term One we discovered that this is an issue of key importance across Royal Holloway's professional service teams. One of our early discussion points highlighted how the University halls of residence accommodation guarantee was created with students' wellbeing in mind. The current University policy around the allocation guarantee for first-year undergraduates,

continuing undergraduate students returning from a year abroad or a year in industry and international postgraduate taught students is in place because there is an awareness that their wellbeing needs are likely to be greater than continuing students who do not interrupt their studies. First years and international postgraduate taught students really benefit from the guarantee because the early days of settling into their new life at Royal Holloway can be emotionally overwhelming and, as discussed, this period is a key transition point in a new student's university experience. In a similar vein, continuing students who have returned from studying abroad and a year in industry are also participating in a similar transition point because they have lost their year group, and the majority of these students undergo a period of readjustment to life at Royal Holloway usually in their final year of study. The allocation guarantee for students in any year of study who receive a recommendation from the Wellbeing team and DDS is also in place to address students who require adapted rooms or might be more vulnerable and need quicker access to University central service teams like Student Wellbeing. Many students highlighted these reasons in their explanations of why they applied for a halls place.

I have severe mental health issues and therefore being able to have access to wellbeing and it being close to me was an important decision. Also the price of accommodation as I haven't got a large income. –Rate Your Union, 2020

My disability (leg condition) meant I had to live on campus as I sometimes struggle to walk. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I'm disabled. I have safe foods. I don't feel comfortable sharing bathrooms. –Rate Your Union, 2020

As I spent my third year abroad [departments redacted] I wanted to live with friends who were in a similar position, so we all chose to select Gower halls as our top choice for Final Year accommodation. –Rate Your Union, 2020

All students at Royal Holloway, regardless of their accommodation status, can access University professional service teams like the Student Wellbeing Team, Student Services and DDS as well as the Students' Union Advice Centre for all housing and wellbeing queries. Students who live in University halls of residence, however, do have the added benefit of other central service teams like Halls Reception Customer Service and the Halls Life Team. Three years ago there were no bespoke engagement and activities for students living in University halls of residence, but the creation of the Hall Life team has really filled that gap. The Halls Life Team is composed of fellow students who have previously lived in University halls of residence. In addition to providing students with in-person and virtual halls events, team members receive training to help students who might be having difficulties with their living situations, but they also work with key contacts in many of the University professional service teams and the Students' Union and will direct students to these services for more specialised help when necessary.

While there are good central services available to students living in University halls of residence, our conversations with University stakeholders highlighted that more needs to be done throughout the year to provide wellbeing support to students who live in private housing around Royal Holloway or commute on a regular basis. There is also the issue that many students living off-campus or commuting feel like the services currently available to students are only for those who live in halls of residence, and the University needs to ensure all students at Royal Holloway understand they can access these services. In our 2021 Student Housing survey we asked students who live in both halls of residence and the private sector who they

would go to if they were having an issue with their housing and the table below presents the results.

Q30. If you were having an issue with your housing, which service would you go to for support as your first point of contact?	
Service Team	% respondents
SU Advice Centre	33.15
University staff	4.89
Wellbeing Services	5.98
Halls Life Team	13.04
Halls reception customer service	22.83
Don't Know	20.11

Table 13: First point of contact, Student Housing survey, 2021

The results suggest that students who live in private housing are perhaps more likely to go to the Students' Union Advice Centre when they have a query whereas students who live in University halls of residence are more likely to access the services provided by the Halls Reception Customer Service and Hall Life Team. We also asked students whether they felt informed about support available to them in relation to housing, and only 59.67 per cent of students indicated they did. This figure, combined with the 20 per cent of respondents who do not know which service is the most appropriate first point of contact for their housing issue, indicates there is more work to be in this area to better inform students about the support available to them. We asked students to explain why they do or do not feel informed about housing support, and a sample of responses are listed below.

I am not entirely sure on who to contact for different things. I wish when I moved in I was given a leaflet of who to contact for what and for when. –Student Housing survey, 2021

I understand that Hall Life team have certain events but I don't really know who I would go to for support regarding different concerns - perhaps staff contact information or drop in sessions should be provided at the end of each newsletter? –Student Housing survey, 2021

Clear advice and information given by the university regarding tactics when looking for housing, when to start looking and what to expect. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Mental support. Keeping in contact with those away from campus. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Understanding and considerate advice on living by yourself. Also some help with all the different options available. –Student housing survey, 2021

Information on where to start: where to look for a house; how to set a budget; what you need to know about bills and rent; what you should look out for. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Despite the question being open to students in all accommodation situations, the majority of feedback pertained to a lack of support for those living in private housing. Many students asked for financial guides, checklists, information about looking for private housing, and contract checks to name a few. The University and the Students' Union Advice Centre already do provide a lot of information which touches on these issues. For example, when students move out of University halls of residence, the Hall Life Team and Student Wellbeing Team provide education material to students like the 'Be a Good Neighbour Guide' which has useful information on what to expect when moving into private housing. It has a moving checklist, a

household cleaning rota template, it discusses ways to diffuse conflict in the house, outlines the various waste and recycling bins in line with the Council's regulations. The 'Be a Good Neighbour Guide' also discusses ways student can have positive living experience in the local community through volunteering and other activities. The Students' Union also has a lot of information about the private housing life cycle and specialised material like the Housing Rights blog series for students in the private sector. We also provide specialist services like contract checks and help students with the legal side of deposit disputes and landlord misbehaviour. As mentioned in previous sections of this report, there are steps the Students' Union can take to make this information more accessible and prominent on the Housing section of our website.

There are also additional steps the University can take to ensure information about University central services and housing information is similarly accessible on their online platforms. The University should collate all halls information in a single place on both the University website and Royal Holloway App with a view to moving all information to the Royal Holloway App when it has more widespread use by students. By collating this information, the University should also work closely with the Students' Union and clearly signpost where students can find private housing information on the University website and Royal Holloway App. The integration of private housing information on the University website would allow the University to engage with more students and improve their sense of belonging on campus. One way this could be achieved is with a clearly signposted link to the Students' Union Housing Advice page and HouseSearch website on both the University Accommodation page and the Royal Holloway App. The Students' Union should, in turn, signpost an easily accessible link for the University Accommodation webpage on the Students' Union webpage.

Students feeling safe in their housing situation is another area of concern among key University stakeholders, and it is intrinsically tied to student wellbeing and has the potential to negatively impact their university experience. As this was brought up in our discussions during Term One, we felt it was important to ask students in our Student Housing survey in Term Two whether they felt safe in their current hall of residence and 73.33 per cent of respondents indicated they did. When we asked students to explain their feelings around safety most of the responses were negative and highlighted issues like disrepair, parties, location of room, broken locks, strangers in their flat, flatmate problems and University security services. Below are a sample of student comments about their feelings of safety in University halls of residence.

Completely run down, mouldy, cold, scared for my health as I have asthma which has been made worse since moving in. –Student Housing survey, 2021

During nights, it's too loud outside, and there are some people who seem to drunk too much. Since my room is the ground floor I'm worried about the security. Even if there are some doors which require card key, they can break the window. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Incredibly no. I recently submitted a complaint form to the university about the insecurity I have experienced whilst living in university halls. The free movement of maintenance and security staff in and out of rooms and communal spaces is unsettling. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Lots of parties not being dealt with by security. –Student Housing survey, 2021

My room was invaded by a stranger attending a party at my flat who I didn't know who proceeded to touch me and sit on my bed, not leaving until one of my male flatmates

intervened. Ever since then I've felt very uneasy in my flat and don't really want to go back after lockdown. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Not necessarily unsafe but one of our housemates makes myself and the other girls feel uneasy by being too 'touchy feely' with us when alone. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Please keep in mind I am in Reid, not Runnymede. The door to my particular block often breaks and there have been multiple times where people we do not know have walked in without our permission. We also have a 24 year old living in our block, who has been kicked out of 2 unis in the past for drug abuse and is still addicted to drugs. He has made inappropriate to some of the girls in the block and has made us feel very unsafe, especially as he has admitted to doing MDMA and Ketamine in the block. – Student Housing survey, 2021

The door was broken so anyone could come in. there was an incident of assault because of this, before it was fixed. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Our front door was broken for a very long time. Anyone could enter without a keycard or password. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Have called security multiple times about disturbances and not received any physical response. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Student responses in the survey revealed there are recurring issues which need to be addressed, especially students' experiences of harassment and assault in University halls of residence. Many respondents did not comment whether they reported the incident to the relevant University service team or local police, however the University should make sure information about reporting harassment and assault is clearly signposted on the University website so students fully understand the options and support available to them. Students living in halls should be signposted to this information as part of their halls induction. In tandem with this, the University should conduct a review to better understand the harassment of women in halls, implementing changes to processes and/or procedures where appropriate. The SU President had some follow-up discussions with key University stakeholders in Term Two and discussed the findings from our surveys like the issue that there is a recurring problem with students experiencing assault and harassment in halls. The University was keen to better understand students' experiences and tackle this problem, and has already begun the process of trying to address this issue. In Term Three of this academic year the RH100 focus group will discuss harassment and conduct at Royal Holloway. Importantly, while we only asked students living in halls about whether they felt safe in their living situation, students living off-campus should also be signposted to this information so they can report any experiences of harassment and assault off-campus, especially if it involves other Royal Holloway students. Moreover, the University should review its current policy around out-of-hours and crisis support to determine whether it is fit for purpose and prioritises students' wellbeing, including returning and commuter students who live in the wider community and further away from the Egham campus. The University should additionally ensure that all information relating to this service is up-to-date and easily accessible on the University website.

Another recurring student comment was the issue of broken locks on exterior and interior doors in University halls of residence. Students highlighted this was an issue in multiple halls of residence across campus, and it absolutely had a negative impact on their feeling around feeling safe in their accommodation. Therefore, the University should introduce a policy which states that broken locks on halls' exterior and interior doors will be resolved in a 24 hour period. In instances where this is not possible, an alternative solution needs to be in place to ensure

students' safety in halls until the lock is fixed or replaced. Finally, students comments about the Security and Maintenance Teams having unrestricted access to their room highlights there is confusion about the University's security policy. Because of this, the University and Students' Union should collaborate and undertake a general review focusing on security and safety on campus and, once complete, education material should be provided to students and staff so they have a better understanding about the policies in place to provide a safe environment at Royal Holloway.

Royal Holloway is an open campus, and the presence of non-students walking around and enjoying the University grounds is a regular occurrence. Many members of the local community like walking the University grounds with their dogs and families, and in pre-pandemic times before the creation of household bubbles many students would have non-University guests visit them from time to time. The current University guest policy states: 'Guests are not permitted in Halls after 11pm apart from in family accommodation where the occasional overnight guest is permitted.'⁵⁰ The Students' Union were curious to understand whether the guest policy had any impact on students' feelings about safety in their University hall of residence. We asked students in our Student Housing survey what their thoughts were on the current University guest policy, and the results revealed there is a spectrum of opinion about this policy. Some students agree with the policy and feel it is not enforced enough by the Security Team. Other students feel it is too harsh and punishes students who would like partners, friends or family members to be able to stay overnight in their flat instead of The Hub. Some students feel it should be enforced this year because of the pandemic, but once the concept of household bubbles permanently disappears they no longer feel like the guest policy should apply. Other comments highlighted how their flat had an unofficial agreement to allow guests to stay overnight even though this has the potential to create security risks for having a non-registered resident in the building. Below are a range of student comments about the University's current guest policy.

Fine, but needs better enforcement, especially students moving in with their partners to better accommodations without paying rent or following rules. –Student Housing survey, 2021

From experiencing many flatmates breaking this rule, it's not enforceable anyway, and should be relaxed to allow people to have a friend/loved one stay over temporarily for the sake of well-being or homesickness. –Student Housing survey, 2021

I don't think this is fair (obviously with COVID situation it's different) but in normal situations we are young adults and we pay a lot of rent to live in the accommodation and it shouldn't be up to the university when guests leave, it's should be a case if the rest of the people in the flat are happy with a guest. –Student Housing survey, 2021

This role seems to be fine. However, even students living on campus can be a threat. Also, people are not allowed to stay in someone's room, but some students stay in a kitchen until late night. They are so noisy and if they drunk too much, they can be the threat, too. –Student Housing survey, 2021

I like that policy and wish it was more strictly enforced. –Student Housing survey, 2021

⁵⁰ Royal Holloway University of London, 'Accommodation Terms and Conditions 2021/22' <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/media/16730/accommodation%20terms%20and%20conditions%202021-22_final.pdf> [accessed 11 May 2021].

It doesn't leave much freedom, but it's understandable for safety reasons but still. – Student Housing survey, 2021

I think it's fair in some ways but would be good if you could get an overnight guest permit or extremely reduced hub guests. That being said the uni don't enforce it at all, even when they should, we had someone's Dad living in our flat for a month or so and the uni wouldn't take any action even when we alerted them multiple times. –Student Housing survey, 2021

I think it's a good idea, but it's never enforced, even during coronavirus. It needs to be enforced more. I've been woken up a lot by people coming and going in the middle of the night. They have no regard for those sleeping who take uni seriously. It also leads to drunkenness and drug-taking, which are obviously not good for the community. – Student Housing survey, 2021

There is a real opportunity for the University to engage with students about this issue to better understand their views on this issue. The University should work with students to conduct a review of the current guest policy, including its purpose and effectiveness. When undertaking this review the University should consult with current students directly through online surveys and focus groups

C6. Student Satisfaction: University and private halls of residence

We asked students in both our 2020 Rate Your Union and 2021 Student Housing survey about their satisfaction with their current halls of residence. The tables below presents the results from both of those surveys.

University and Private Halls	% of respondents						
	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree
Q3. I am satisfied with my accommodation this year	33.45	35.84	14.68	3.07	5.08	2.73	4.44

Table 14: Student satisfaction University halls of residence, Rate Your Union, 2020

Q11. How satisfied are you with your hall of residence this year?						
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	N/A
% of respondents	6.67	39.17	23.33	19.17	10.83	0.83

Table 15: Student satisfaction University halls of residence, Student Housing survey, 2021

In the 2020 Rate Your Union survey, 83.97 per cent of students agreed they were satisfied to some degree, with 69.29 per cent of students agreeing in the top two categories. In our 2021 Student Housing survey, 45.84 per cent of students indicated they were satisfied with their University hall of residence. While the questions were not structured the same in both surveys, the numbers do suggest a shift in dissatisfaction with their accommodation in the last year. The pandemic is one reason for this decrease in satisfaction, especially as students were forced to live in household bubbles or unable to reside in a room they were effectively paying for during lockdown. There are, however, other instances which might impact a student's satisfaction with their accommodation like affordability, flatmate relationships, facilities and

access to University central services. We believe the previous sections of this report have examined how these areas could influence a students' satisfaction with their room in University halls of residences, however, there is one area we have alluded to multiple times but have not yet fully addressed—room disrepair and maintenance issues. In our 2020 Rate Your Union we asked students whether they agreed with the following statement: 'Any issues with the fabric of the building (i.e. fixtures and maintenance) have been dealt with swiftly'. The table below presents the results of this question.

University and Private Halls	% of respondents						
	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree
Q3. Any issues with the fabric of the building (i.e. fixtures and maintenance have been dealt with)	26.28	22.53	16.04	8.53	12.97	6.48	7.1

Table 16: Student satisfaction with room condition in University halls of residence, Rate Your Union, 2020

Both our surveys highlighted that this issue has the potential to really impact a student's satisfaction with their room. A large proportion of students used the free text response about their satisfaction to complain about room disrepair and maintenance delays in fixing any issue that arose. While there were instances in the survey where students explained they had problems which were fixed, this was not a common comment. Below are a sample of student responses which touch on this problem.

Had a faulty shower and reported it, nobody sent to fix for a week went to check how long it would be and the report had never been logged Paid 6000 this year for a faulty shower and a kitchen that was never clean. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I believe Gower is too expensive for the quality of the rooms (old and not refurbished). This brings me to say that in George Elliot they pay roughly the same amount for accommodation built less than 3 years ago. Showers continuously clog and pieces break (e.g. extractor fan which still has not been repaired after months - even though i noted it before Covid became a thing). –Rate Your Union, 2020

I had a problem with my shower that would make a constant loud dripping noise that was constantly disturbing and did not let me sleep over the winter period. It was only after the first term when I vacated for Christmas it was resolved. Also my toilet seat kept falling off, despite fixing on numerous occasions. Moreover, on numerous occasions electricity and hot water would cut off on multiple occasions, resulting in asking a friend from another halls of residence to use their facilities, again not value for money. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I had many problems with constant mould and ventilation, and shower blockages and they all took days to complete. Someone half-fixed my shower and just left it in a state for 5 days so I had to use my flatmate's shower. A window in the kitchen were broken and they didn't fix it, just checked up on the one that was already fixed. Our fridge was broken for months and they didn't replace it for months, the iron was broken, the

washing machine was broken and not fixed at all, the oven broke, the microwave was extremely loud, there wasn't much storage space in rooms. –Rate Your Union, 2020

The price for Runnymede 2 is ridiculous especially as i was paying the same amount as people that were living in Runnymede 1 (which was far newer and nicer). My toilet (and my friend's toilet who lived next door) had a sewage problem which they kept trying to fix but the smell never went away. As well as this, the mattress was awful and I could feel springs digging into my back so I had to buy two mattress protectors. There was also a problem with the radiator which did get fixed as soon as I complained however my friend next door had to have a portal radiator as they never fixed hers. Our fridge also stopped working and started leaking and there was a power cut in the kitchen however this was fixed as soon as I complained. The biggest issue was the shower, every single person in the flat had a shower that made this awful noise when you turn it on as well as this the whole en-suite shook when you turned on the shower. Sorry for complaining so much!! –Rate Your Union, 2020

My housing is disgusting, the kitchen is so old that it's falling apart and nothing is clean no matter how much we try to clean it. People from my block and in my flat are very noisy and often smoke indoors and nothing is done to remedy this. Overall I feel my flat is very over-priced for what it is and I don't like it at all. –Student Housing survey, 2021

A lot of stuff didn't work when I first moved in but other than that, it was great. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Poor maintenance team. Had to report the same issue 5+ times for it to be fixed. Been dismissed by security when calling the emergency out of hours number. –Student Housing survey, 2021

I live in a basement room that gets very little light. Last term a water pipe burst in my ceiling and drenched my floor. The kitchen is poorly equipped for the number of students that live in the flat. Thankfully we have not needed to isolate this term but if we had, it would have had a detrimental impact on all our mental health by being stuck in that flat. All in all, I am extremely unsatisfied by my current hall of residence. – Student Housing survey, 2021

Room is a nice size but maintenance teams sometimes don't fix issues and mark them as fixed. –Student Housing survey, 2021

The student comments about disrepair and maintenance delays caused us to question whether the issue was also connected to the current system of student enquiries and how, with so many professional service teams involved with University accommodation, did these maintenance requests fall through the cracks. In our 2021 Student Housing survey we asked students whether they ever had a reason to contact the University about a housing issue and 66.67 per cent of respondents said they did. We asked a follow-up question about their reasons for contacting the University, and the tables below present the results to this question as well as their satisfaction with the University's response to the issue.

Q13. What was the reason for contacting the University about a halls issue? (Tick all that apply)	
Reason	% of respondents
Disrepair or Maintenance	78.48
Room allocation	12.66
Contract dispute	12.66
Mental health and wellbeing	20.25
Roommate conflict	13.92
Other	15.19

Table 17: Reason for contacting University, Student Housing survey, 2021

Q14. How satisfied are you with the University response to the issue?						
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	N/A
% of respondents	12.66	22.78	18.99	20.25	24.05	1.2

Table 18: Student satisfaction with University response, Student Housing survey, 2021

Room disrepair and maintenance issues were the leading cause for students to contact University central services, however, only 35.44 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the University's response to their issue. Positive instances highlighted by students were the support they received from the Student Wellbeing Team. Unsurprisingly, negative responses were usually because there were delays or a lack of response to maintenance requests. A more coordinated and quicker response to student enquiries is one way the University could improve student satisfaction with their University halls of residence. Therefore, the University should review the way its professional service teams manage student enquiries about accommodation and consider how they can have a more coordinated and streamlined response through a Student Enquiry Management system. It is understood this could require time to develop and implement.

C7. Student satisfaction: private housing

The affordability section highlighted that students felt University halls of residence were better value for money than what was available in the private sector in the wider area around Royal Holloway. We were curious whether their satisfaction rating followed a similar pattern. The tables below present students' satisfaction ratings in the private sector in both the 2020 Rate Your Union and 2021 Student Housing survey.

Private Housing	% of respondents						
	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree
Q10. I am satisfied with my accommodation this year	28.47	35.40	16.42	3.65	8.03	4.01	4.01

Table 19: Student satisfaction in private housing, Rate Your Union, 2020

Q22. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your landlord or managing estate agent?						
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	N/A
% of respondents	26	30	17	14	10	3

Table 20: Student satisfaction with their relationship with landlord and estate agent, Student Housing survey, 2021

In the 2020 Rate Your Union, 80.29 per cent of students were satisfied with their private housing accommodation to some degree, with 63.87 per cent agreeing in the top two categories. Again this reveals that students are less satisfied with accommodation currently available in the private sector than in University halls of residence. This argument is further supported by the fact that 73.48 per cent of respondents indicated they had previously lived in University halls of residence before moving into private housing. Many students discussed in the survey some of the key challenges they experienced in their living situation were a lack of communication from the landlord and estate agent, financial disputes between flatmates and landlords, and, finally, poor property conditions.

In the 2021 Student Housing survey we wanted to learn more about students' satisfaction with their relationship with their landlord and managing estate agent because this was a leading cause of complaint in our 2020 Rate Your Union survey. Only 56 per cent of students indicated they were satisfied with this relationship.

In a similar vein to students' experiences of living in University halls of residence, many survey respondents indicated they were dissatisfied with the condition of the property and delay with maintenance repairs. When we asked students in private housing in our 2020 Rate Your Union survey what key challenges and issues they faced in their housing for the 2019-20 academic year, 37.10 per cent of respondents indicated it was room disrepair or maintenance delays. We also asked students in private housing whether they agreed with the following statement: 'Any issues with the fabric of the building (i.e. fixtures and maintenance) have been dealt with swiftly'. The table below presents the results of this question.

Private Housing	% of respondents						
	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree
Q10. Any issues with the fabric of the building (i.e. fixtures and maintenance have been dealt with)	25.55	18.25	16.42	10.58	10.58	10.95	7.66

Table 21: Student satisfaction with property condition in private housing, Rate Your Union, 2020

The numbers reveal that the property conditions in private housing in the wider area around the University are not maintained in as good of condition as University halls of residence, and students are similarly dealing with maintenance delays from their landlords and estate agents. When students were asked to explain their satisfaction ratings in both surveys about their experiences in private housing, there was a similar trend in highlighting the condition of the property as a leading cause for dissatisfaction. Other examples were poor communication

between the landlord, estate agent and student, unannounced visits, whether they received a rent rebate during COVID and problems with neighbours. Below are a sample of student responses from both surveys explaining their satisfaction rating.

The state of the house was appalling when we first moved in, however the landlord then fixed it up in the first month. The location is fantastic though! –Rate Your Union, 2020

The landlord never does anything quickly but it does get sorted. We haven't had hot water for over a month (none of us have been there so it's not that bad but now people are wanting to go back to move out and we're having to keep waiting to get hot water). –Rate Your Union, 2020

We had mouldy walls and had to have a mouldy cupboard replaced. Also the neighbours were very rude, always knocking assuming we had parked in her space which we never had. And every time we had people over they would call the uni to complain even though we had left the house before 10 as we needed to get the SU to get the guaranteed entry. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I lived in a [name redacted] property at the beginning of the year. I had to move out due to the landlord and manager being awful (coming round unannounced/being over involved/unwilling to resolve pest problems in the house etc) and blackmailing me when I tried to leave the contract. I did not get any of my deposit back at all when leaving the tenancy, despite sticking to the contract in every way possible. [Name redacted] are unprofessional and should be removed from the SU recommended landlords page. –Rate Your Union, 2020

The landlord has generally been good although some issues have taken a long time to resolve. For example, the radiator didn't work in my room for the first 3 months of living in the house so took a long time for that to be fixed. But they have been very accommodating in terms of rent payment this summer due to the current circumstances. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I was lucky enough to find a couple who let a couple of houses around the area. They were literally like my mum and dad - always at the other end of the phone when there were issues with the house. They would pop by from time to time to clear the gardens and the outside of the house. They were also kind enough to pay a little towards our bills during the lockdown. –Rate Your Union, 2020

I couldn't discourage people from using [name redacted] more if I tried. I find them extremely slimy and unpalatable in how they conduct business. They withheld my inventory from me until a week past a deadline that they had set for me to add my own photos and notes, lying to me the entire time saying that they couldn't access the document themselves, they did not clean my house before I moved in, and withheld my keys from me on the first day of my tenancy, only for me to find out that it was not ready for me to move into on the second day of my tenancy... There's a whole host of issues that I have with them, furthermore they are currently harassing me to renew my contract with daily reminders, yet have shown me no concern or urgency about mould in the property, or removing an old bookcase that remains from the previous tenant (after asking for both of these issues to be sorted out since September)' –Student Housing survey, 2021

My landlord has given me a discount on rent for this term due to COVID, but his communication is not always the best. –Student Housing survey, 2021

They don't answer emails in a timely manner, they didn't give us much notice to resign the contract for third year and then wouldn't answer our questions about it and said that if we didn't sign the contract within a week the house would go onto the market again. They don't send out repair men very fast when we need things fixing and they don't properly answer inquiries we have unless we get our parents to call on our behalf. –Student Housing survey, 2021

We had no shower and a ceiling that was threatening to collapse for 9 months 2019-2020. It took 2 reports to the local council before he fixed it. Alpha said it was the landlord's problem. Landlord was slow at best. –Student Housing survey, 2021

While we cannot recommend a more streamlined and coordinated student enquiry approach for landlords and estate agents in the private sector, the Students' Union can continue to build positive relationships with these individuals while simultaneously offering students support and further raise their awareness about their legal rights as tenants in the private sector.

C8. The future of student housing in a post-pandemic world

While the UK is currently easing lockdown restrictions and universities are hoping to return to a more traditional educational experience in the autumn, the coronavirus pandemic will have a lasting effect on the way students participate in the higher education experience. Our Student Insight Reports, *Digital Education I* and *Digital Education II* touched on the way universities have forced to adapt teaching and learning throughout the pandemic, but there are other areas of the student experience which will be impacted by events of the last year.

We asked students in our 2021 Student Housing survey how the pandemic has changed their current housing situation. Many students commented that they moved home or their flatmates did. They additionally revealed they experienced strong feelings of isolation and loneliness during the various UK lockdowns if they remained in their housing situation. Flatmate disputes also increased for students in the private sector when it came to splitting finances, and there were also instances where students reported increased conflict if members of the household bubble did not follow COVID guidelines. Some respondents maintained they did not feel supported by University staff or their landlord depending on their living situation during the pandemic and, sadly, many students found it difficult to make new friends and secure housemates for the next academic year because they were unable to socialise due to social distancing. Below are a selection of student responses which detail their experiences during the pandemic.

Caused stress in household due to mixing and everyone having to isolate and people getting annoyed. Bad unhealthy living environments due to atmosphere. –Student Housing survey, 2021

Currently paying for rent when studying at parents' home (rent free) and not offered any reduction. Issues with getting all of housemates to pay bills as we're not there. – Student Housing survey, 2021.

For myself and everyone I know it has made it so much harder to meet new potential housemates. I ended up in my house now as I was pressured and knew I wanted to find other people for 3rd year, which thankfully I have managed to do, but the pandemic has just made finding other house groups more difficult, and you can see it on overheard etc every day. –Student Housing survey, 2021

I am not at halls during lockdown, even though the majority of my belongings were left there in September, so I am currently living very minimalist. I hope to return for third

term to get my money's worth out of the accommodation but I am simultaneously dreading living with my flatmates again with virtually no support in Egham, since making friends during a pandemic has been very difficult and also increased my social anxiety significantly. –Student Housing survey, 2021

I haven't been able to fully enjoy living on-campus and my room is more of a storage room for my belongings at the moment.' –Student Housing survey, 2021

It affected friendships with housemates so that the house was not the happiest living environment, and I'm currently stuck paying for a house I'm not living in and that only causes me to worry when I think about it - I no longer want to have to go back there. – Student Housing survey, 2021

Made me more anxious when people who don't live with me come into our accommodation. –Student Housing survey, 2021

A large proportion of survey respondents indicated they spent a significant period of time away from their accommodation throughout the various lockdowns this last calendar year. While the University has given students rent rebates, many current students will be apprehensive about what awaits them next autumn when they will move into private housing where landlords are unlikely to offer rent reductions or rebates if there is another lockdown. Our discussions with landlords and estate agents have already highlighted students are delaying signing contracts and confirming housing for the next academic year, but there is a real possibility some students will not return if online learning remains the main form of teaching.

Students' living experiences over the last year have brought about a heavy feeling of uncertainty, and the pandemic has forced many higher education institutes to be more flexible with how they provide accommodation for their students. In our discussion with key University stakeholders we learned there have been changes to their accommodation policy because of the pandemic. One example of how they have adjusted it is that the University will now be offering contracts later in the summer to time with UCAS results.

While this is one change that is occurring, it cannot be denied that higher education institutions will be forced to deal with the effects of the pandemic for years in all areas of the student experience, but this does not have to be perceived as an entirely negative thing. The idea of including, for example, flexible room contracts for students in University halls of residence has the potential to improve some students' overall higher education experience. For example, if blended learning is to continue, there will be a proportion of students who might be unsure about returning to University on a full-time basis because of COVID. If these students have the option to book a flexible room, it might slowly reacclimatise them to the idea of returning to campus on a more permanent basis. Flexible room books could also have a really positive impact on the commuter student experience and increase their sense of belonging on campus. Flexible rooms would allow a commuter student to stay on campus on their busier teaching days, and it would also allow them the opportunity to attend academic or social events in the evening they previously would have missed due to travel restrictions. The creation of flexible room bookings would absolutely reduce students' concerns about safety around COVID as well as with the issue of traveling late at night. Therefore, the University should consider including a set number of flexible room bookings in University halls of residence. Flexible room bookings should be set up to be reserved on a daily rate like a hotel which would give commuter students and guests the option to stay on campus overnight.

C9. Conclusion and next steps

We are confident that we have undertaken some insightful initial research into the housing situation in University halls of residence and private housing in the wider area surrounding Royal Holloway. We believe that we have articulated a number of recommendations which, once implemented, would have a substantial and long-lasting positive impact on current and prospective students with an aim to make student life better while studying at Royal Holloway.

Recommendations:

1. General Recommendations

- 1.1 The University should review the way its professional service teams involved with University halls of residence manage student enquiries about accommodation and consider how they can have a more coordinated and streamlined accommodation response through a Student Enquiry Management system. It is understood this could require time to develop and implement.
- 1.2 The University should collate all halls information in a single place on both the University website and Royal Holloway App with a view to moving all information to the Royal Holloway App when it has more widespread use by students. The University should work closely with the Students' Union and clearly signpost where students can find private housing information on the University website and Royal Holloway App. The integration of private housing information on the University website would allow the University to engage with more students and improve their sense of belonging on campus. One way this could be achieved is with a clearly signposted link to the Students' Union Housing Advice page and HouseSearch website on both the University Accommodation page and the Royal Holloway App. The Students' Union should, in turn, signpost an easily accessible link for the University Accommodation webpage on the Students' Union webpage.
- 1.3 The University should be more transparent about the financial distribution of University halls fees, and this information should be signposted clearly on the Accommodation webpage. The breakdown of halls income and expenditure could be presented as an infographic in a similar vein to the financial breakdown currently on the University webpage.
- 1.4 The University should consider including more visual material about University halls to make the Accommodation webpage more engaging and informative for prospective and current students when applying for a halls place. One way this could be achieved is by including 360 degree photos of rooms on the University Accommodation webpage which showcase the various price bands in each hall and includes their location on a University map. Updating the current presentation of halls would make it more accessible to students who are unable to visit campus on open days, and it would additionally help manage students' expectations about the University housing options available.
- 1.5 The University should trial the introduction of lifestyle flats for the following categories: alcohol free, single-sex, LGBTQ+, and quiet halls. The University should review which types of lifestyle halls would be best suited to the Royal Holloway community. Once approved, lifestyle halls would be a part of the halls application process and can also be allocated on a recommendation from a member of the University's professional services like Wellbeing or DDS for students who do not receive an accommodation guarantee. It is important that lifestyle halls are not filled by students looking for a University halls place who have not selected one of the above features. The introduction of lifestyle halls has the potential to minimize roommate conflict and positively impact students' feelings about safety on campus. It is understood this would require time to develop and implement.

- 1.6 The University should consider including a set number of flexible room bookings in University halls of residence. Flexible room bookings should be set up to be reserved on a daily rate like a hotel which would give commuter students and guests the option to stay on campus overnight. The introduction of flexible student rooms which are cheaper and separate from The Hub would not only reduce the pressures of commuting for students on days they are required to be in Egham, it would also increase the community feel and give them the option to attend academic and social events in the evening. Finally, the creation of flexible room bookings would reduce students' concern about safety and traveling late at night.
- 1.7 The University should consider reviewing the price bands of self-catered rooms in older halls of residence to see whether any of them can be reduced and offered to student on a more budgeted rate.
- 1.8 The University should review its current policy around out-of-hours and crisis support to determine whether it is fit for purpose and prioritises students' wellbeing, including returning and commuter students who live in the wider community and further away from the Egham campus. The University should additionally ensure that all information relating to this service is up-to-date and easily accessible on the University website.
- 1.9 The University Hall Life team should continue to work closely with the Students' Union Advice Centre and circulate information in their newsletters and on the Royal Holloway App about the Students' Union HouseMating service which helps students find housemates as they transition out of University halls to the private sector.

2. Halls Application Process

- 2.1 The University should review the current software used for halls applications and decide whether it is fit for purpose. If it is decided that a change in software needs to occur, the University should additionally review its allocation process. It is understood that this could take time to develop and implement.
- 2.2 The University should consider streamlining the application process by reducing the number of halls students rank, and by changing the way room options are labelled in the application. The current system of ranking price bands rather than room types in specific halls is both confusing and, in some cases, potentially misleading. Switching to hall names and room types rather than price bands would manage student expectations about the housing options available. One way the University could reduce the preference number is by asking students to rank only five preferences.

3. Maintenance and Security

- 3.1 Working in collaboration, the University and Students' Union should undertake a general review focusing on security and safety on campus and, once complete, education material should be provided to students and staff so they have a better understanding about the policies in place to provide a safe environment at Royal Holloway.

- 3.2 The University should make sure information about reporting harassment and assault is clearly signposted on the University website so students fully understand the options and support available to them. Students living in halls should be signposted to this information as part of their halls induction.
- 3.3 The University should conduct a review to better understand the harassment of women in halls, implementing changes to processes and/or procedures where appropriate.
- 3.4 The University should introduce a policy which states that broken locks on halls' exterior and interior doors will be resolved in a 24 hour period. In instances where this is not possible, an alternative solution needs to be in place to ensure students' safety in halls until the lock is fixed or replaced.
- 3.5 The University should work with students to conduct a review of the current guest policy, including its purpose and effectiveness. There is opposing opinion among students about the current guest policy, including whether the University should have one at all. When undertaking this review the University should consult with current students directly through online surveys and focus groups.

4. Rusham Park:

- 4.1 The University should discuss with the service provider whether integration of SMART technology is possible in a set number of flats, or all flats at Rusham Park. This would allow students the opportunity to be more environmentally sustainable and earn money back if their expenses are lower than the expected cost to run. This will additionally help students to be better prepared for life in the private sector.

5. The Students' Union

- 5.1 The Students' Union should give the Housing Rights blog series a more permanent place on the Students' Union webpage and ensure it is easily accessible for students to find.
- 5.2 The Students' Union Advice Centre should consider recording three short videos explaining in brief the services offered at the Advice Centre for each stage of the student private housing lifecycle: Looking, Living and Leaving. These recordings offer another medium to relay information, and the videos could be promoted on social media to time with important dates in the year.
- 5.3 The Students' Union should have regular reviews of their communications plan around housing blogs and articles which are sent out to students, agents and landlords to ensure messaging is clear, appropriate and up-to-date.
- 5.4 The Students' Union should continue to investigate ways to have a successful working relationship with landlords and estate agents in the local area, ensuring quality and standards continue to be driven up and poor or inappropriate practices are challenged.

Appendix A: Housing Questions included in Rate Your Union, May 2020

The list below details the 16 open- and closed-ended questions in the order that they appeared in the May 2020 Royal Holloway Students' Union Rate Your Union survey. The table below explains the survey layout and includes notes highlighting required questions and logic skips.

Opening question	
1. Have you lived in a University-owned or privately-owned hall of residence this year? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	Multiple Choice Required Question Logic skip Yes: Question 2 No: Question
University and private halls of residence	
2. Please tell us which hall of residence you lived in this year?	Free text response Required question
3. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I am satisfied with my accommodation this year. ▪ I consider my accommodation to be good value for money. ▪ Any issues with the fabric of the building (i.e. fixtures and maintenance) have been dealt with swiftly. <p>Please could you explain your answer in a little more detail?</p>	Matrix scale with comment box <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Definitely agree ▪ Mostly agree ▪ Slightly agree ▪ Neither agree nor disagree ▪ Slightly disagree ▪ Mostly disagree ▪ Definitely disagree Required question
4. When making your decision about your Hall of Residence, what importance did you place on the following features? Please rank from 1 (highest priority) to 7 (lowest priority) in order of decision-making priority. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catered/self-catered ▪ Contract length ▪ Facilities (i.e. en-suite/kitchen/other) ▪ Location ▪ Price ▪ Safety and security ▪ Other Wellbeing and support services 	Ranking Required question
5. Were there any other key factors when making your decision? Please specify.	Free text response Required question
6. If the following options had been available as a matching filter at the point of applying for halls, would you have used them? Please tick all that apply. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alcohol free ▪ Quiet halls ▪ Single Sex ▪ None of the Above ▪ Other, please specify 	Checkboxes with comment box for others
7. What changes, if any would you like to see made to your particular hall of residence?	Free text response Required question Logic skip to question 15

Private Housing	
<p>8. Have you lived in private housing that wasn't a hall of residence this year, i.e. a flat, house or a room in a house?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	<p>Multiple choice Required question Logic skip Yes: Question 9 No: Question 15</p>
<p>9. Roughly, in which location do you live?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Egham ▪ Englefield Green ▪ Staines ▪ Other, please specify 	<p>Multiple choice with comment box for Other Required question</p>
<p>10. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I am satisfied with my accommodation this year. ▪ I consider my accommodation to be good value for money. ▪ Any issues with the fabric of the building (i.e. fixtures and maintenance) have been dealt with swiftly. <p>Please could you explain your answer in a little more detail?</p>	<p>Matrix scale with comment box</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Definitely agree ▪ Mostly agree ▪ Slightly agree ▪ Neither agree nor disagree ▪ Slightly disagree ▪ Mostly disagree ▪ Definitely disagree <p>Required question</p>
<p>11. Please tell us what influenced your decision on your final housing choice.</p>	<p>Free text response Required question</p>
<p>12. What key challenges and issues have you faced with your house this year?</p>	<p>Free text response Required question</p>
<p>13. What key challenges and issues have you faced with your landlord or letting agent this year?</p>	<p>Free text response Required question</p>
<p>14. What changes, if any, would you like to see with your private housing?</p>	<p>Free text response Required question</p>
General questions	
<p>15. If you could choose your ideal living arrangement for the duration of your time at University, what would it be? (i.e. University Halls; Private Halls; Private Housing)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Year 1 ▪ Year 2 ▪ Year 3 	<p>Three comment boxes Required question</p>
<p>16. What support would you like to see from the Students' Union in relation to housing (either halls or private housing) next year?</p>	<p>Free text response Required question End of survey</p>

Appendix B: Private Housing Survey, January 2021

The list below details the 29 open- and closed-ended questions in the order that they appeared in the Private Housing survey we sent landlords and estate agents in the local area in January 2021. The table below explains the survey layout and includes notes highlighting required questions and logic skips.

Respondent information	
1. What is your name?	Free text response Required question
2. Are you an estate agent or landlord? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Estate Agent ▪ Landlord 	Multiple choice Required question
3. If you are an estate agent, or have an estate agent manage your property, please list the company you work for or use below.	Free text response Required question
4. Are you the first point of contact for your student tenants? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	Multiple choice Required question Logic skip Yes: Question 5 No: Question 10
Estate agent fully-managed properties	
5. What percentage of your rental properties are fully-managed with no landlord involvement?	Free text response
6. What standard protocols do you undertake for fully managed properties each year? Tick all that apply <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepare properties for new tenants e.g. cleaning and repairs ▪ Review energy certificate ▪ Annual gas safety checks ▪ Soft inspections ▪ Other 	Check box with comment box for Other
7. Have you made any changes to check-ins/outs following the Tenants Fees Bill 2019? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>If yes, please explain what changes have been made?</p>	Multiple choice with comment box
8. For fully managed properties what's your average response time for reported issues? Answer all that apply? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disrepair (damp, cracks, leaks) ▪ Utility faults (boilers, kitchen appliances, etc) ▪ Vermin ▪ Financial issues (deposits, disputes, inability to pay rent on time) ▪ Other 	Comment boxes for all answers

<p>9. Who handles disputes for fully-managed properties?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Estate agent ▪ Landlord 	Multiple choice
General Questions	
<p>10. What are your average monthly rent prices for the following student property sizes? (Please answer all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Single bedroom properties ▪ 2 bedroom properties ▪ 3 bedroom properties ▪ 4 bedroom properties ▪ 5 bedroom properties ▪ 6 bedroom properties ▪ 7 bedroom properties ▪ 8+ bedroom properties 	Comment boxes for all answers
<p>11. Do you offer individual tenancies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	Multiple choice
<p>12. What aspects of your rental properties do you feel are appealing to student tenants? Please tick all that apply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Close proximity to campus ▪ Double beds ▪ En suites ▪ Back garden ▪ Parking ▪ Other, please specify 	Checkboxes with comment box for Other
<p>13. Do you regularly update the property? (e.g. every five years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>If yes, what aspects of the property do you refurbish?</p>	Multiple choice with comment box
<p>14. At what point are students expected to pay the deposit?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At signing ▪ Later 	Multiple choice
<p>15. At what point are students expected to pay for the first month's rent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At signing ▪ Later 	Multiple choice
<p>16. Please explain your policy around guarantors? (i.e. what criteria must guarantors meet and your process for approving guarantors. Do you use credit check software or do you check the criteria yourself?</p>	Free text response

<p>17. If a student does not have a guarantor do you ask the student tenant for a larger advance in rent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>If yes, please explain the amount and when these rent instalments are due.</p>	Multiple choice with comment box
<p>18. Do you offer zero-deposit schemes like Reposit?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>If yes, please list which scheme you use.</p>	Multiple choice with comment box
<p>19. Do you offer tenancies shorter than 12 months?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>If yes, please list the length of these shorter tenancy agreements.</p>	Multiple choice with comment box
<p>20. Do you offer reduce rent during the summer period?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>If yes, how much of a reduction do you offer student tenants?</p>	Multiple choice with comment box
<p>21. How long on average does it take you to send a list of proposed deductions on deposits to student tenants once they've moved out?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Less than one month ▪ One to three months ▪ More than three months 	Multiple choice
<p>22. How has the coronavirus pandemic impacted the process of renting properties to students?</p>	Free text response
<p>23. Are you signed up to the SU's HouseSearch platform?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	Multiple choice Logic skip Yes: Question 24 No: Question
HouseSearch	
<p>24. How long have you used the platform?</p>	Free text response
<p>25. How satisfied are you with HouseSearch?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very satisfied ▪ Satisfied ▪ Neutral ▪ Unsatisfied ▪ Very unsatisfied ▪ N/A <p>Please explain your rating</p>	Matrix scale with comment box

<p>26. Do you find HouseSearch easy to use with managing your advertisement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	Multiple choice
<p>27. Have you had any technical difficulties with HouseSearch or the property management software Controlpad?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>If yes, please explain further</p>	Multiple choice with comment box
<p>28. Since joining the platform have you had a student tenant sign a lease after finding you on HouseSearch each academic year?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	Multiple choice
In your own words	
<p>29. In your own words please describe one positive experience and one negative experience you have had with Royal Holloway student tenants.</p>	<p>Free text response</p> <p>End of survey</p>

Appendix C: Student Housing Survey, February 2021

The list below details the 38 open- and closed-ended questions in the order that they appeared in the Private Housing survey we sent current Royal Holloway students in February and March 2021. The table below explains the survey layout and includes notes highlighting required questions and logic skips.

University & Private Halls	
1. What is your student status? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Home/EU ▪ Overseas 	Multiple choice Required question
2. What year are you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UG 1Y ▪ UG 2-4YR ▪ PGT 1YR ▪ PGT 2YR ▪ PGR 1Y ▪ PGR 2 + YR 	Multiple choice
3. Have you lived in a university owned or privately owned Hall of Residence this year? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	Multiple choice Logic skip Yes: Question 4 No: Question
4. Please tell us which Hall? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Runneymede 1 ▪ Runneymede 2 ▪ Tuke ▪ Williamson ▪ Butler ▪ Gowar & Wedderburn ▪ George Eliot ▪ Penrose ▪ Highfield ▪ Kingswood 1 ▪ Kingswood 2 ▪ Hox Park ▪ The Pad ▪ The Podium ▪ London Intercollegiate Halls 	Multiple choice Required question
5. Do you feel there is a wide range of room price bands available? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No Please explain your answer below	Multiple choice with comment box
6. What are your thoughts on the original application process for halls accommodation? (Think about the application timeline, the questions, the process of confirming a place).	Free text response

<p>7. If the following options had been available as a matching filter at the point of applying for halls, would you have used them? Please tick all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Single Sex – Yes / No ▪ Alcohol Free – Yes / No ▪ Quiet Halls – Yes / No ▪ Vegetarian/Vegan – Yes / No ▪ LGBT+ - Yes / No 	<p>Check boxes</p>
<p>8. Is the hall you currently live in one of your top three preferences when you applied?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	<p>Multiple choice</p>
<p>9. Do you feel safe in your current halls of residence?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>Please explain your answer</p>	<p>Multiple choice with comment box Required question</p>
<p>10. What are your thoughts on the University's current policy about having guests?</p> <p>A guest can't stay overnight in your room, they must leave by 11pm. By guest, we mean anyone who isn't registered or contracted to live in your room or flat. If you are caught with a guest in your room this may lead to misconduct proceedings by the Hall Life team.</p>	<p>Free text response</p>
<p>11. How satisfied are you with your current hall of residence?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very satisfied ▪ Satisfied ▪ Neutral ▪ Unsatisfied ▪ Very unsatisfied ▪ N/A <p>Please explain your rating.</p>	<p>Matrix scale with comment box Required question</p>
<p>12. Have you ever had a reason to contact the University about a housing issue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	<p>Multiple choice Required question Logic skip Yes: Question 13 No: Question 23</p>
<p>13. What was the reason? Tick all that apply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disrepair / Maintenance ▪ Room allocation / Contract dispute ▪ Mental health and wellbeing ▪ Roommate conflict ▪ Other 	<p>Multiple choice</p>

<p>14. How satisfied were you with the University response to your issue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very satisfied ▪ Satisfied ▪ Neutral ▪ Unsatisfied ▪ Very unsatisfied ▪ N/A <p>Please explain your rating</p>	<p>Matrix scale with comment box Required question Logic skip All answers: Question 23</p>
<p>Private Housing</p>	
<p>15. Did you previous live in University Housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	<p>Multiple choice Required question Logic skip Yes: Question 16 No: Question 18</p>
<p>16. Which University Halls did you live in?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Runnymede 1 ▪ Runnymede 2 ▪ Tuke ▪ Williamson ▪ Butler ▪ Gowar & Wedderburn ▪ George Eliot ▪ Penrose ▪ Highfield ▪ Kingswood 1 ▪ Kingswood 2 ▪ Hox Park ▪ The Pad ▪ The Podium ▪ London Intercollegiate Halls 	<p>Multiple choice</p>
<p>17. How satisfied are you with your previous hall of residence?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very satisfied ▪ Satisfied ▪ Neutral ▪ Unsatisfied ▪ Very unsatisfied <p>Please explain your rating.</p>	<p>Matrix scale with comment box</p>
<p>18. Roughly, in which location do you live?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Egham ▪ Englefield Green ▪ Staines ▪ Other – please specify 	<p>Multiple choice</p>
<p>19. What Estate Agents did you use to source this housing?</p>	<p>Free text response</p>

<p>20. How far in advance did you sign your contract before moving in?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More than a year ▪ 9-12 months ▪ 6-9 months ▪ 3-6 months ▪ Less than 3 months 	<p>Multiple choice Required question</p>
<p>21. Did you have any difficulties with securing private housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>If so, what were they?</p>	<p>Multiple choice with comment box</p>
<p>22. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your landlord or managing estate agent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very satisfied ▪ Satisfied ▪ Neutral ▪ Unsatisfied ▪ Very unsatisfied <p>Please explain your rating</p>	<p>Matrix scale with comment box</p>
General housing questions	
<p>23. If you could describe your current housing in 3 words, what would they be?</p>	<p>Three comment boxes</p>
<p>24. What key challenges (excluding pandemic) and issues have you faced with your housing this year?</p>	<p>Free text response</p>
<p>25. If you could change one thing about your housing experience (excluding the pandemic), what would it be?</p>	<p>Free text response</p>
<p>26. How has the pandemic changed your current housing situation?</p>	<p>Free text response</p>
<p>27. How has the pandemic changed your future housing plans?</p>	<p>Free text response</p>
<p>28. Do you feel informed about the housing options available to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	<p>Multiple choice</p>
<p>29. Do you feel informed about support available to you in relation to housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>Please explain your answer below</p>	<p>Multiple choice with comment box</p>
<p>30. If you were having an issue with your housing, which service would you go to for support as your first point of contact?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SU Advice Centre ▪ University Staff ▪ Wellbeing Services ▪ Halls Life Team ▪ Halls Reception Customer Services ▪ Don't know 	<p>Multiple choice Required question</p>

31. What support do you feel you need when moving into private housing?	Free text response
32. Do you know that the SU Advice Centre provides housing support? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	Multiple choice
33. Have you used the Students' Union Advice Centre for housing related queries? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No <p>If yes, which ones have you used and please describe your experience</p>	Multiple choice with comment box Required question
34. Have you used HouseSearch? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	Multiple choice Required question Logic skip Yes: Question 35 No: Question 37
35. Did you sign a contract with a property you found on HouseSearch? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes ▪ No 	Multiple choice
36. Please describe your experience with HouseSearch.	Free text response
37. Where did you learn about SU Advice Centre Housing support services? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SU Website ▪ SU Housing Fair ▪ University Central Services ▪ Social Media ▪ A friend 	Multiple choice Required question
38. Do you have any further thoughts on housing that you would like to share?	Free text response End of survey

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