

Imperial College
London

First year student accommodation strategy

2019 update



As outlined in the College's *Strategy 2015-20*, it is our objective to "enrich the student experience...[through a] broad range of activities, services and support". As such, we are committed to meeting the expectations of the student experience through providing a wide range of accommodation facilities that are high quality, accessible and which foster a strong student community within London.

Background

Imperial has been steadily increasing its student accommodation bed-stock over the previous ten years, guided by the overarching objective of achieving 2,550+ directly owned and managed first year undergraduate bed spaces in order to provide a portfolio of student residences that is appropriate to the requirements of the College and diversity of our students.

This is underpinned by our commitment to providing comfortable, safe, fairly priced accommodation within reasonable commuting distance of the College's Central London campuses for all first year undergraduates – this forms part of our "first year guarantee". This guarantee assures all incoming first year students who apply in time a place in halls.

Key criteria of our current strategy

The First Year Student Accommodation Strategy outlines the key criteria that guide future developments around the College's student accommodation.

- 1.1 We seek to establish communities in clusters of 350+ students in purpose designed, modern, en suite accommodation, within 30 minutes travel distance of our campuses. We are also committed to providing accommodation within a range of price brackets to ensure that facilities are affordable and enable an inclusive community.
- 1.2 The desire to create student communities enables accommodation facilities to be equipped with study areas, community spaces and utility spaces such as laundry rooms and communal kitchens. These are all requirements as expected by students - and the smaller, aged accommodation stock of previous years has not included many of these essentials. Crucially, clusters of accommodation also foster a strong sense of community amongst residents, ensuring a higher level of student satisfaction and quality of living.
- 1.3 Following close liaison with our students and through the assessment of historical feedback, we aspire to meet the expectations of current students for modern, single en suite rooms with high-speed broadband and modern, well apportioned communal facilities. We also aspire to provide a social infrastructure, with a high-quality Wardening team to provide pastoral care and social support.
- 1.4 This strategy has led to the removal of some older and not fit for purpose sites from the portfolio. In these instances, these sites did not meet the above criteria and were deemed to no longer meet student expectations.

How the first-year hall portfolio has evolved

- 1.5 As detailed above, we have been operating under the objective of delivering 2,550+ undergraduate bed spaces that meet the criteria listed. As such, we have spent the previous 10 years consolidating our existing stock through improvements and refurbishments whilst also developing new projects, primarily through the expansion and construction of an ambitious student community in North Acton. Throughout this process, those residences that have not met the aforementioned criteria have gradually been phased out of service wherever possible.
- 1.6 Southside (opened in 2007), Eastside (opened in 2009) and Beit Hall together provide 1198 bed spaces for students on the South Kensington campus. During 2013-14, the East Wing basement level of Beit, which had previously been used for storage and meeting rooms, was converted to new ensuite bedrooms, increasing the overall capacity of Beit Hall to 339 students.
- 1.7 Wilson House, in Paddington, closed in 2012 for extensive refurbishment including the construction of a new block of en suite bedrooms on land to the rear. Once the newly refurbished hall fully re-opened in 2014, it provided accommodation for 391 students, therefore providing an uplift of 120+ bed spaces.
- 1.8 Xenia, a 166 bed hall of residence located in Waterloo, is owned by the Salvation Army Housing Association and has been leased to the College since 2012. The current lease expires in 2021, although the College has an option to extend the lease for a further two years if required.
- 1.9 In September 2015, we opened a new development in North Acton: Woodward Buildings. Woodward houses 690 students in a mixture of single and double occupancy rooms with large kitchens shared by a maximum of 8 students and large array of different communal facilities, including a multi-faith prayer room, a rooftop terrace and BBQ garden area. Woodward allowed for the removal of 613 bed spaces in Evelyn Gardens from the first year portfolio.
- 1.10 Kemp Porter Buildings, opening in September 2020, will be the second 'flagship' Imperial hall of residence in North Acton. It will provide for 710 students in en suite single and en suite twin rooms alongside a range of high quality communal facilities such as lounges, study rooms, and a rooftop terrace.
- 1.11 Together, Woodward and Kemp Porter will represent the largest community of Imperial students in the portfolio and signify the College's continued commitment towards developing and improving the quality of residences available to our students. The expected surplus of bedspaces will also allow a greater strategic flexibility in regards to future developments of the portfolio.
- 1.12 North Acton as a whole is experiencing significant development as a student community, with Imperial being one of many institutions or providers that are developing in the area. The Costume Store (170) and Holbrook (45), managed by iQ Student Accommodation and Downing Students respectively, have been utilised to provide allocations of high-quality but temporary bed spaces over recent years, whilst the College's increased student numbers outpaced the accommodation portfolio. This reliance on external providers will no longer be required upon the opening of Kemp Porter Buildings in 2020.

- 1.13 We are also committed to providing better accommodation and facilities at more affordable rents. When Garden Hall closed in 2013, the rent range was between £74.06 and £165.41 per week. When Weeks Hall closed in 2015 the rent range was between £156 and £166 per week. As of 2019-20, the rent range for Woodward Buildings was between £105 and £157 per week, thereby demonstrating that we are meeting our commitment to provide a range of rents to cater to the range of students that attend the College.

Recent and upcoming changes

- 1.14 As part of our assessment of student expectations, it is also clear that certain older properties within the accommodation portfolio have not been able to meet our fundamental criteria. Consistent issues, such as the absence of en suite facilities, outdated infrastructure, insufficient leisure space and increasing safety issues, were prevalent amongst certain buildings. As such, a period of consolidation and gradual removal has occurred in recent years.
- 1.15 The properties that formed Garden Hall were not originally designed to house students and as such were poorly configured and did not meet the modern requirements expected. The buildings had numerous safety issues including subsidence, asbestos and damp/water ingress as well as pipework falling into poor condition. Similarly, Weeks Hall suffered from a high level of maintenance issues associated with the age of the building.
- 1.16 Due to the size of the student population at Garden Hall and Weeks Hall, they were inefficient in terms of the provision of management. Both halls of residence included inefficient areas within the properties which were given to maintenance, management and storage and therefore artificially inflated the weekly rent of the property and therefore led to high running costs. Ultimately, both halls were removed from the portfolio in 2015 upon the opening of Woodward Buildings.
- 1.17 Looking ahead, we face similar challenges with two current residences. Pembridge Gardens, in Notting Hill, has become evidently lacking and is no longer fit for purpose in relation to the stated objectives of the Accommodation Strategy. It has a poor student to kitchen/ bathroom ratio, consistently deteriorating plumbing and an infrastructure that was not designed for the use that it has experienced for a number of years.
- 1.18 Parsons House is not owned by the College, with 46 bed spaces leased from A2Dominion Group. The property has an unsatisfactory bed to bathroom ratio, deteriorating infrastructure and is not signed up to the UUK Accommodation Code of Practice. Given our position as a leaseholder, we are extremely limited in how we are able to influence any improvement works to the building.
- 1.19 This unsatisfactory situation does not meet the College's strategic objectives for the student community. Given that we are now in a position where we are not dependent on the additional bed spaces these two locations provide, it has been decided to remove Pembridge and Parsons from the first year portfolio at the end of the 2019-20 academic year.

Halls Exit Survey 2019

| | All halls average | Woodward average | Pembridge average | Parsons average |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Quality of bedroom | 8.99 | 10 | 7.24 | 6.73 |
| Quality of kitchen | 7.28 | 9.34 | 5.06 | 5.06 |
| Quality of bathroom | 8.47 | 9.87 | 6.8 | 6 |
| Internet provision | 8.1 | 9.37 | 4.24 | 6.44 |
| Social spaces | 7.89 | 9 | 5.82 | 3 |

Survey of current residents 2018-19 academic year, number of respondents: 466

