



Worcester Graduate Accommodation Survey 2011

(Anonymised Version)

Summary

- It should first be noted that the MCR is in gratitude to the college for refurbishments made to graduate housing over the last couple of years, including various refurbished bathrooms and the new kitchens in Mitchell. Graduates are on the whole satisfied with the quality of accommodation provided, particularly those living in Franks and Richmond Road houses. There are however some issues universal across housing that require addressing, as detailed in this report.
- Graduates are content with the 'basic cleaning' that is provided, and some houses were particularly complimentary of their scouts (notably Worcester House and 21 Worcester place). There were a number of issues however common to multiple houses:
 - There is often a lack of a 'deep clean' in the summer before new students arrived. Although extended tenancy contracts often means that houses are not fully empty, it would seem to be minimally arduous for the Accommodation Office to cooperate with the occupants of near empty houses to ensure certain communal facilities are not used (e.g. fridges) while a clean is in progress. The Nelson Street flats were in a particular bad state, and it is perhaps concerning that college claimed these had been 'adequately cleaned'.
 - Bathroom facilities are often not cleaned satisfactorily, with frequent problems of mould being left unaddressed.
 - Some students noted that daily visits by scouts were unnecessary, and a bi-daily clean with more emphasis on communal facilities would be a more efficient use of scout time.
- In the Richmond Road and Worcester Place houses, numerous students raised concerns with insulation and/or inadequate heating. In the longer term, the college may wish to improve insulation to both reduce energy costs as well as in improving its environmental record.
- The relative rent prices of different Worcester Place houses should be reviewed. There are extensive problems with Mitchell Building, although it has been agreed that such problems would require too much extensive work to rectify, and instead the lower quality of the accommodation should be reflected in the price.
- There have in the past a small number of cases of poor work ethic in a minority of scouts. While one particularly serious issue (in the case of a temporary scout) was addressed very promptly by the Accommodation Office, there has been an apparent previous lack of scout supervision that led to such problems being left unnoticed for long periods of time (and

students are often reluctant to raise these problems given the inevitable awkwardness it brings). The recent appointment of an additional scout supervisor is considered a positive step in the right direction.

Environmental Issues

- Scouts often replace bin bags even when they are virtually empty.
- Some students are woefully unconscientious with regards to energy usage, with lights in communal areas often left on, or even lights/appliances in rooms left on when away.
- The reusable shopping bags scheme seems overall to have been successful. Reusable bags in 17 & 20 Worcester Place and Franks are missing. The new scheme appears to have had no impact on 16 Richmond Road. Mitchell Building would like some bags.
- 20 Worcester Place has no recycling facilities. Mitchell Building reports they have no recycling facilities, but there are actually recycling bins available outside – these should probably be moved inside, and another set of bins provided so there's bins in both upstairs and downstairs kitchens.
- In 19 Richmond Road, while recycling facilities are adequate, tenants are apparently not recycle-friendly and make inadequate use of them. They similarly not do not use the canvas shopping bags provided.
- 17 Worcester Place: "Do you guys recycle paper in UK? Significant amount of paper trash is generated when people study in their rooms, at least for me. If there would be another bin for paper trash in every room that would be good. Currently paper doesn't get recycled."
- Poor insulation of many of the houses leads to significant energy inefficiency, e.g. 17 Worcester Place "This is more like an English thing in general but it feels like the wind comes in straight through the windows. It's not a big problem, you can always turn up the heat, but I'd guess it costs a lot in terms of energy." Same problem of bad insulation reported in 17 Richmond Road, and 19 Richmond Road said: "Heating is a huge waste of money; college needs to insulate and install double paned windows."
- Nelson Street Flats: "3 night lights burn day and night outside the flats. Maybe they should be replaced by one light and a motion sensor?"
- "I understand that charging individuals for energy based on the amount of energy they use in their room/house brings its own sets of problems. But the system at the moment encourages mass waste which is both terrible for the environment and must cost the college a lot of money. At the moment, if I have 4 electric heaters, a de-humidifier and leave every light on/window open in the house then there will be no consequence for me in terms of my energy bill as I will pay the same amount as the most environmentally conscientious student. Splitting the bill across all students encourages mass waste, e.g. most houses I have spoken to have their water/central heating on 24 hours a day and several open their windows to cool the house down. This would never be the case in private accommodation where people pay for the energy they use."
- 16 Richmond Road: "Recycling at Richmond Road is awful. This is primarily due to the green compost bins that we are required to use by the council. This bin is in a permanent state of filth, it stinks and it's typically crawling with insects in the summer. It needs to be cleaned every week and seems to be a permanent nuisance. Further to this, we do not have adequate rubbish collections at Richmond Road. It is my understanding that the council

collects rubbish and recycling material on alternate weeks. This means that we have one green rubbish wheelie bin for six people's rubbish over two weeks. This is completely inadequate and leads to the rubbish overflowing from the bin. It is also my understanding that the council can fine us if this happens. I understand that this is not an issue that the college should be solving, however if you ask me whether our house has adequate recycling facilities then i have to say no."

Worcester House

General: Rooms have grossly inadequate wardrobe space, although the smaller size of the rooms understandably renders this a difficult problem to address.

Specific Issues:

Room X: "There are very large cracks in two of the windows in my bedroom which could eventually cause these panes to break. The wallpaper is also cracking and peeling off in several places."

Room X: "There are no dials on my heater, so you can't change the settings, and you can't use the storage heater function - only the convector." And "The depth of the wardrobe is less than the span of a coat hanger, so it's not possible close the door, as long as there's anything in the wardrobe. But since the catch on the door doesn't work, the door won't close anyway. It doesn't matter to me, but a future tenant might find it more annoying."

Room X: "The wall paint under the sink is peeling off in very severe way and needs to be replaced". "The desk chair cushion cover is starting to fall apart".

Room X: Severely uneven floor means that desk and bookcase has to be propped up with door stops in order to keep them falling over. Mould on the front of the radiator (appears to be newspapers and plastic that have 'melted' onto it).

Communal Facilities: Shower in need of an extensive clean, particularly the ceiling and upper walls which has mould. The shower curtain is too long and technically poses a health and safety risk. Not enough cupboard space in the kitchen for 9 people.

Cleaning: Residents were overall very complimentary of the scout. Issues raised: "No dusting of shelves and desks; these accumulate a considerable amount of dust after a week or two."

17 Worcester Place

Specific Rooms:

Room X: "The wall is crumbling under the window." "The chair is in poor condition."

Communal Facilities: “The lock of the lower toilet is broken.” “Our sink turns on very abruptly, it makes a lot of noise and sounds as if it were about to break.”

Other Comments: “Lovely back yard we have now thanks to gardeners!”

19 Worcester Place

Specific Rooms:

Room X: “Everything pretty standard for a Z grade room, e.g. some bits of wall that need re-painting/re-plastering.” “Plenty of storage space, thanks.”

Room X: “The walls do not look that great: the paint/wallpaper has come off in several places and there is even a big hole in the wall next to the door. Also I had a problem with mould on the windows, but I managed to solve that myself. A final thing is that I think the lights above the bed should be fixed: they are now hanging on electrical cords (which should not be the case).”

Cleaning: “No issues with the cleaning except that I don't see the purpose of having a scout clean for me. I never notice whether the scout has been here or not but I think they Hoover every now and then and empties the bins.”

“All graduate students can clean up their own room, Hoover, and empty their bins. I don't see why we need scouts for this. What we do need scouts for, i.e. what students don't tend to do, are things like the deep cleaning of ovens/freezers on a less regular basis. Also, maintenance does an excellent job with regard to specific things reported to them, but there is no system for doing things like repainting corridors or rooms. As a result of both of these things the rooms look quite worn down and the kitchen facilities are left in a bad state because students don't want to be the first person for a few years to have a go at cleaning things like an oven.

I'm not sure how we are expected to determine whether the scouts have done a good job without knowing what their job is supposed to be. I would like the accommodation manager to provide us with a list of what bits of the kitchen/bathrooms/rooms the scouts are meant to clean and how often/what days. Also how often are they meant to empty the bins. Also are they meant to empty the communal bins of the house? If no, then why one set of bins not the other? This lack of information on what the scouts are supposed to do results in a huge variation in quality between the different houses and means that students don't feel they can complain because they feel what's going on in their house is the norm. Also, is there any other way of judging the quality of scout cleaning other than this survey? If not, is that system not obviously flawed? Scouts could get away for at least a year with doing nothing and never be noticed, and more importantly scouts who do a great job don't get the rewards they deserve. I think there should be a system other than complaints in place to assess the performance of scouts, and the complaints system would be greatly aided with some information on what the role of scouts was supposed to be.”

Communal Facilities: “1 fridge/freezer between 6 people is not enough. In Richmond Road building they have 2, which is necessary.” “The only thing is that it would be nice to have an extra fridge+freezer, since we only have one with 6 people.” “The heating in the kitchen/living room is not

working great, therefore it is always cold in there.” “The toilet on the 1st floor is extremely hard to flush.” “The room of the washing machine has I believe mould on the walls.”

Other Comments:

“The insulation in our house is not good. The window panes are so thin that you can actually feel the flow of heat moving across the room and leaving through the window. This is fine because we have our heating on full (and from above we have no incentive not to do so) which makes our individual rooms warm enough. However, the insulation/heating is so bad that even with every single heater in the house turned to the maximum our lower toilet managed to freeze, and the taps had icicles protruding from them. I think the college could save a lot of money in the long run if they spent a bit of money on insulation.”

“In the garden it would be nice to have something proper to attach bikes to (my bike was stolen from the garden in October).”

20 Worcester Place

Specific Rooms:

Room X: “There is ivy growing through the front window and the sache window mechanism needs attention- they don't stay open.”

Room X: “Radiator has no adjust function. The cap that should control this is broken.”

Room X: “Not particularly well insulated. One wall is perpetually cold from outside, and window draft.” “The desk is quite small - enjoyed having two desks/larger desk as undergraduate - but it is adequate.”

Room X: “Yes, the hot water from the tap on my floor (top floor) is absolutely filthy and I have filled 3 maintenance requests (2 last term and one this term) to get some work done on it but to no avail. It's so bad that I brush my teeth with bottled water now.”

Communal Facilities:

Bathroom: “YES - shower is ridiculously weak, needs to be made more powerful. This has been written in the maintenance book but apparently ignored. It is a drip more than a shower at the moment. (This is the shower directly opposite side entrance)”.

“The water flow from the shower in the smaller/secondary shower downstairs is so slow so it's impossible to shower properly as the speed of water flow is not high enough. As a result, we all have to use the second shower which means it is constantly full. I have filled about 13 requests since September 2010 for someone to have a look at this but nothing has been done.”

“very damp; slimy walls. Light bulb poor (eerie red light). On/off pulls could do with replacing. One shower has little pressure.”

Lounge: "Damp. Tyre marks in carpet?! Could do with repainting."

Kitchen: "Damp has caused large areas of the plasterwork to be exposed in the lounge area of the kitchen-diner. We have put posters over them." "There is a big chest that takes up a large amount of room and is fairly pointless. Would be better to have a sofa there - at the moment only have a sofa for two people, so communal relaxation is not encouraged." "It would have been good if it had been thoroughly cleaned with all the junk (old broken crockery, stray cooking sauces etc.) removed before we moved in."

Cleaning: "Michaelmas term room rarely vacuumed and furniture certainly not dusted (as suggested in graduate handbook)." "I would like to express how grateful we are for the new scouts and their attempts to clean the house thoroughly this term." "Our scout does not clean the bathroom properly. It seems he/she only takes out the trash."

Other comments: "Worcester Place 20 and Worcester Place 19 should not be the same price."

21 Worcester Place

Specific Rooms:

Room X: "The PVC window is not fitted tightly to the rest of the frame so that a significant breeze (enough to make curtains billow!!!) comes through the gap, which is a real problem during winter. This is a problem throughout the house." "A taller/bigger bookcase would be useful."

Cleaning: "We receive an absolutely outstanding cleaning service from Carol, who is exceedingly diligent."

Communal Facilities: "One of the toilets has a hole in the ceiling which lets in cold air during the winter. There is no heating in that room so it is consequently very cold in the winter."

Other Comments: "I think it is important for the college to inform graduates who are continuing for a second year in the same accommodation where they need to go and when to sign their new accommodation agreement and set up the standing order for the new year. This is my second year in the same room, and it took several months for college to mention anything about paying for it. When they did get round to it, the letter made it sound as if I had deliberately not been paying them (i.e. in arrears etc.) when in fact, I had received no communication from them about how they wanted it to be paid. This came on top of being charged the wrong amount for accommodation over the summer. More efficient organisation in both instances would have been appreciated."

Franks

Specific Rooms:

X: "some deep cleaning of the shower would be appreciated", "the shower is rarely ever cleaned".

X: "Not enough shelf space"

X: "some wet ceiling and mould in the bath room" "a more orthopaedically friendly desk chair would probably be suitable for hard studying students" "cleaning could be a bit more thorough"

X: "The Heating needs to be better. There are two heaters but not of much use. They need to have an adjustable timer. The current ones are not effective as you have to keep turning them on every hour." "The wardrobe needs to have more smaller compartments for daily wear clothes rather than the current one with just two big compartments."

X: "Yes, there is no plug in the bathroom, it is very inconvenient." "in bathroom it would be nice to have a couple of hooks for towels, and may be a small shelf near the mirror" "the lock for my assigned cabinet in the 2nd floor kitchen does not correspond to the lock for my room, so my key does not work. "

Communal Facilities:

Kitchen: "One of the fridges is broken. Not enough fridge space" (A). "It lacks cutlery, but otherwise fine." (A) "the kitchen is quite dirty, there are things standing around probably from last year, but nobody throws them away... there should have been a thorough cleaning between one group of students moving out and a new group moving in" (A)

Other Comments: "more bike racks needed"

16 Richmond Road

Specific Rooms:

Room X: "I have huge bay windows, which are inadequately insulated."

Other Comments: "My room was inadequately heated over the cold spell in December. I realise that this was an exceptional period of weather, and that I was certainly not the only one to be suffering from the cold. However, I feel that the college should provide accommodation that is warm enough to live in. Waking up in bed shivering in the middle of the night and not being to work in my room during the day due to the cold is not good enough in my opinion. Work is needed to improve the insulation of the house." "Great garden!"

Cleaning: "Yes, fine, though the whole house probably needs a deep clean (curtains, stairs, windows, ceiling corners, hallway surfaces etc.), which I completely understand probably isn't feasible."

Communal Facilities: "There's a dodgy lock on the middle toilet that sometimes locks people in, which probably ought to be fixed at some point."

17 Richmond Road

Specific Rooms:

Room X: “more closet space/deeper or bigger closet drawers would be appreciated”

Communal Facilities:

Kitchen: “The water takes forever to get hot. It’s cold in the kitchen, and the windows are super dirty”.

Shower: “in one of the shower/bathtubs the clip to hold the shower head up is broken so instead you have to hold it.”

Other Comments:

“I had a problem with the heating during December: it was very cold in my room and had to wear full ski suit while sleeping. My heater seemed to be operating so I didn't know anything more could be done. However I notified maintenance and they must have changed something because temperatures suddenly peaked up. I wish I had know that before or that someone would have done this without notice.”

“I wish we had a lounge.”

“The hallways and kitchen in my house are cold. Unless I am in my room I have to wear a sweater. Better windows and insulation would make it warmer and more energy efficient”.

19 Richmond Road

Communal Facilities:

Shower/Bathroom: “The light still does not work, despite having asked several times for it to be fixed. Also, the shower drains extremely slowly.”

Other Comments: “Heating is a huge waste of money; college needs to insulate and install double paned windows.”

Mitchell Building

Specific Rooms:

Room X: “Needs a chest of drawers instead of two desk cabinets. Needs a better heater with a thermostat that can be left on overnight.”

Communal Facilities:

Kitchen: "Oven is very temperamental and burns everything put inside it. 4 hobs between our floor is not enough."

Lounge: "New chairs + bigger dining table would be nice."

Showers: "Too many issues to list, but none that would be easily solved."

Other Comments: "The main problem with Mitchell building, apart from the lack of grads, regards the noise through the walls and the exceptionally poor insulation. Heat is lost very rapidly requiring the electrical heater to be turned on, but this heat cannot be regulated and automatically switches off after a short period of time. This means that overnight, the rooms become exceptionally cold."

Nelson Street Flats

Specific Rooms:

Room X: "The flat had not been adequately cleaned at the beginning of the year (carpets, cobwebs, etc.) We also paid for a carpet cleaner because the carpet smelt."

Other Comments: "Doorbell is broken, which maintenance has been notified of multiple times."