An Exploration of the Relationship Between Physical Spaces and Accommodation on Campus and Student Experience.

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Keywords: Widening Participation, higher education, social mobility, student welfare

Abstract

This project explores the impact of the different accommodation options at the University of Warwick on student experience and how this disproportionately affects Widening Participation (WP) students. Through the analysis of website material and the collection of data using a survey, this project demonstrates the clear stratifying impact that accommodation has on the student community. The survey collected answers from 27 respondents across different demographics at the university. This inequality manifests notably in students' experience of social relationships and environments on campus. This project advocates for the greater standardisation of the accommodation options provided by the University of Warwick to help support WP students' sense of belonging in the university community, and for efforts to be made to better unify the student population.

Contents

Introduction	Page 2
Literature Review	Page 10
Methodology	Page 15
Findings	Page 18
Analysis	Page 29
Conclusion	Page 34
Appendix	Page 36
Works Cited	Page 40

Introduction

The University of Warwick is ranked one of the best higher education institutions in the UK ("Rankings", University of Warwick, 2022), and has an established and everincreasing reputation for research and social development. It is because of this reputation and the resources available to the university that Warwick has a responsibility to investigate and elevate experiences of Widening Participation students in its community. Widening Participation (WP) refers to students from backgrounds and circumstances that may have negatively impacted their access to and experience of higher education. This includes financial disadvantages, statistically low access to higher education in their area or community, declared disabilities, mature students, experience of the social care system and refugee or Asylum seeker status. Although the full extent of the WP community at the University of Warwick is difficult to ascertain, 23% of all Undergraduates are in receipt of the Warwick UG Bursary, 13% have a declared disability and 7% are mature students ("Strategic Planning Analytics", University of Warwick, 2022). Although these groups can overlap, this provides an insight into the large population of WP students at the university. As a result, WP issues, access and experience are crucial for the university to improve and develop, as well as supporting and improving social mobility overall.

As a student and researcher, I approach these issues of WP student experience with emotional and personal investment, which is only emboldened by the growing institutional and academic focus on the topic. I am member of the WP community, representing those who experience financial disadvantage and those who are the first in their family to go to university. As a first year student who was new to the university system and extremely far from home, I stayed in Whitefields accommodation, paying the cheapest rent available on campus, and sharing facilities with 11 other students. I noticed the difference in the facilities provided for different accommodations, having stayed in a small, outdated flat much less impressive than other newer, larger, and more expensive accommodation options. I also encountered many stereotypes of different types of accommodations and different types of students, including the widely used nickname "Shitefields" for Whitefields. Although I can say that overall, the facilities and community in my accommodation were a positive experience for me, the implications of these social norms on campus were unignorable. It is because of these experiences that I wanted to pursue this research project, to ascertain whether other WP and non-WP experiences matched my own, and to gather information on its impact on students' self-perception. As well as this personal passion and investment, I am also well situated to view this issue from an institutional perspective, having enjoyed a place on the debut Widening Participation Student Advisory Group (WPSAG) since 2021. This group, chaired by staff and student representatives, is a forum for students to discuss their experiences and suggest improvements, as well as getting the opportunity to feedback on university policy, plans and documentation. As part of WPSAG I have had the opportunity to hear from students and staff about different opportunities and approaches for WP communities, and to learn about the work being done by staff and students behind the scenes. This corroborated my personal experience of WP life on campus, suggesting that there was indeed a need for investigation into the impact of accommodation on students, and that there are staff who would be committed to acting on student feedback.

Accommodation itself at the University of Warwick houses most first year students, along with some other undergraduate and postgraduate students. The accommodation options focused on in this project represent a range of affordability as follows:

Accommodation	Let Length	Weekly Rent	Yearly Rent	Number of Students per Kitchen
Whitefields	40 weeks	£85	£3387.86	12 students
Cryfield Standard	40 weeks	£109	£4360	14 students
Rootes	40 weeks	£111	£4440	18 students (with further students in shared corridors)
Cryfield Townhouses	40 weeks	£193	£7692.43	12 students
Bluebell	40 weeks	£218	£8688.86	8 students

Item 1 ("Undergraduate campus residences", University of Warwick, 2022/23)

These prices represent the cost of these accommodations for the academic year 2022/2023. In comparison, students living away from their parents, outside London (which includes all home fee paying students living on campus at Warwick) can receive up to £9,706 in Maintenance Loan for the academic year 2022/2023 ("Student finance for undergraduates", GOV.UK). This is an increase from up to £9,488 for the previous academic year. These numbers demonstrate what can be an enormous cost for a student accommodation can be, especially those in the WP community who are unlikely to have financial assistance from their family. The yearly rent for Bluebell accommodation, as seen above, would cost the vast majority of the maximum Maintenance Loan a student could qualify for. Bluebell accommodation weekly rent is a 256% increase on that of Whitefields accommodation, which exemplifies the huge range of accommodation costs for students. This creates obvious disparities between student groups, as students can immediately understand a fellow students' cost of living after discovering which accommodation they are staying in. Furthermore, at the University of Warwick, after submitting ranked preferences for accommodation choices, students cannot appeal the allocation given. It is therefore clear why WP issues are extremely relevant to on campus accommodation, as the decisions made, and prices set by the university can have an enormous impact on students' quality of living.

The following are sample images of the kitchen spaces provided in the accommodations focused on in this project, used as the advertising material for prospective students and residents.

Whitefields kitchen



Kitchen showing fridge, toaster, work surface, plentiful cupboard space and windows

Item 2 (warwick.ac.uk/services/accommodation/studentaccommodation/whitefields, 23/05/2022)

×



Item 3 (warwick.ac.uk/services/accommodation/studentaccommodation/cryfield-standard, 23/05/2022)



Rootes Kitchen

Kitchen with two ovens, sink and plentiful cupboard space

Item 4 (warwick.ac.uk/services/accommodation/studentaccommodation/rootes, 23/05/2022)



Cryfield 12 Bed Townhouse Kitchen × Example



Modern kitchen showing oven, toaster and plentiful cupboard space

Item 5 (warwick.ac.uk/services/accommodation/studentaccommodation/cryfield-townhouses, 23/05/2022)

×



Bluebell kitchen

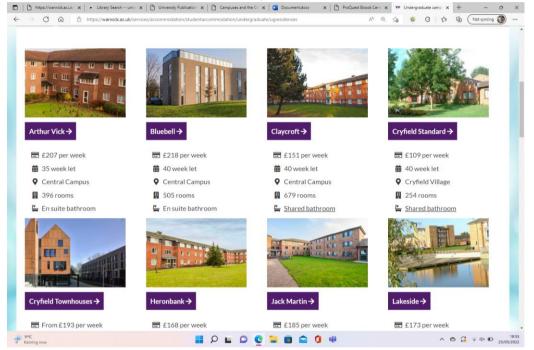
Bluebell kitchen

Item 6 (warwick.ac.uk/services/accommodation/studentaccommodation/bluebell, 23/05/2022)

Although all these kitchens are clean and tidy, the evident difference in the style and space of these facilities not only impact students' experience, but also their self-perception of themselves as students at the University of Warwick. The modern and spacious Cryfield Townhouse kitchen in Item 5, with modern lighting and lots of countertop and storage space for the 12 students that would use the facility greatly contrasts with the Whitefields kitchen seen in Item 2. In this image, the kitchen is furnished with simple metal and narrow countertops and limited space. From my own experience, the lower cupboard closest to the fridge on the far side of this image does not open unless the fridge is also open- a design

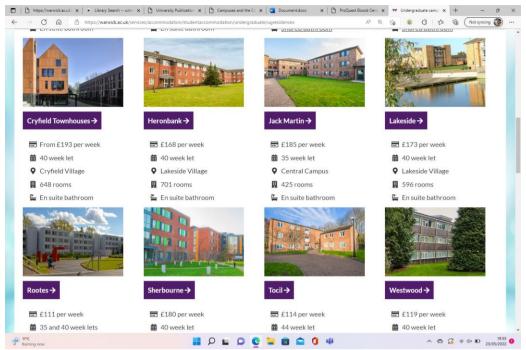
flaw caused by a lack of space and planning for this facility. Furthermore, in both the Whitefields and Cryfield Standard sample images (Item 2, 3) the smoke detectors seen on the ceilings are yellowed, inferably old. This does not mean that they do not pass safety checks or are broken but does represent the lack of improvements and modernisation done to these accommodations, in stark contrast to the impressive kitchens held in Cryfield Townhouses and Bluebell. These aesthetic and practical elements of accommodation facilities surround residents, helping to define their university experience, with the disparities between these accommodations manifesting differently. The extent of this impact is the very answer this project tries to ascertain- whether the more affordable, smaller and more outdated accommodations make their student residents feel less valued by Warwick.

The context of how the University of Warwick presents itself and its accommodation has similar implications from the following screenshots of the accommodation homepage, the first look that prospective students get of the accommodation offered at the university:



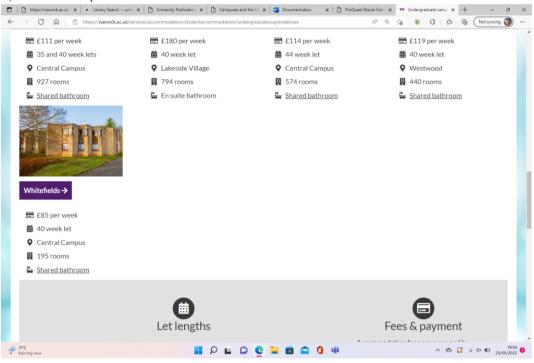
Item 7

(warwick.ac.uk/services/accommodation/studentaccommodation/undergraduate/ugresidence s, 23/05/2022)



Item 8

(warwick.ac.uk/services/accommodation/studentaccommodation/undergraduate/ugresidence s. 23/05/2022)



Item 9

(warwick.ac.uk/services/accommodation/studentaccommodation/undergraduate/ugresidence s, 23/05/2022)

As is demonstrated in Items 7, 8 and 9, the accommodation options at the university are not ordered in any logical order. They do not appear in price ascending or descending order, or any other logical characterisation. It is therefore puzzling why the most affordable accommodation option offered is last to appear on this list (the accommodations also appear

in the same order in mobile view). Many of the accommodations that cost more than double Whitefields' weekly rent are advertised to prospective students before what may seem an afterthought at the bottom.

There are also historical contexts that inform Warwick's campus and its students' experience in 2022. In 2003, Jim Rushton, Deputy Registrar of the University of Warwick at the time, gave a speech to students and staff about the history of Warwick's campus (held in the Modern Records Centre). Rushton revealed that land given for the creation and expansion of the original campus included 7 farms, consisting of 400 acres (about half the area of Central Park in New York City) of land (2003, 4:00 mins). Although this aspect of the campus feels incredibly distant for students in 2022, it is important to consider the immense impact of the University of Warwick on the local area. On more internal concerns, Rushton states that "students won't believe it" but accommodation and social facilities were a high priority when building the first campus (2003, 5:20-6:00 mins). This is reflected in the Student Union's central location on campus, as well as the repeated expansion and improvement to accommodation and social facilities. As a result, it is reasonable to expect that accommodation and facilities on campus meet students' needs and wants, with a student-life focused approach. This suggestion is undermined however when Rushton suggests that future developments to the campus will be done with the tight competition between higher education providers in mind (2003, 16:20 mins). This contradiction embodies the growing theme of a conflict between students' interests and the university's financial interests.

It is the above observations, of my own personal experiences, the University of Warwick's advertising material and the contexts of Warwick's campus that provide the motivations for this project. Although the focus will solely be on the University of Warwick, the insight into student experience, especially those in the WP community will still help shed light on otherwise unknown aspects of the student experience.

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Literature Review

There is an enormous body of research concerning WP issues and experiences before, during and after higher education. Although there is a much larger emphasis on progression to university and degree attainment rather than personal student experience, these issues are still afforded a lot of attention and research globally. However, research focused on the intersection between WP issues and student housing on campus is limited, especially within the UK. As a result, in order to engage with literature relevant to this project, comparisons and links must be drawn to adjacent literature, concerned with university accommodation around the world and in the private sector, as well as the impact of accommodation on mental health and social experiences more generally.

Widening Participation

Based in the West Midlands, Dulini Fernando and Etlyn J. Kenny's (2021) research explores the sense of belonging or fit for business and law students using theoretical approaches and interviews. Fernando and Kenny echo the widely held expectation of universities:

"Higher education is seen as an important vehicle for improving social mobility [...] and credentials from elite universities are often a prerequisite for entry into high paying professions [...] Within the United Kingdom, elite universities are seen as having an ethical responsibility to widen access as they are publicly funded institutions" (2021, p. 133)

Outlined here is the power and authority that universities like the University of Warwick have due to their status as an elite university. As Fernando and Kenny suggest, universities can help improve social mobility by offering students qualifications and experiences to make them qualified candidates for competitive jobs and professions. It is worth considering that although elite universities have the capacity to have this positive impact on students, individuals will have varying experiences of this, impacted by many factors. These may include discipline of study and academic department, WP identity, location of university and many more factors that have any bearing on a student's access to opportunities and materials. Fernando and Kenny themselves state that although the potential and precedent for elite universities having a positive impact on students is extensively documented, "Less is known about how these individuals negotiate a sense of fit in their new institutions" (2021, p. 134). This gap in the research and data that exists surrounding higher education is where this research project firmly lies, attempting to establish the sense of fit or belonging of students and how university provided accommodation impacts this.

This article further underlines the need for WP strategy and attention as "Sixty percent of students from fee-paying independent schools attend Russell Group institutions, in comparison to just under a quarter of students from State comprehensive schools and sixth-form colleges" (Fernando, Kenny, 2021, p. 136). These statistics demonstrate the realities of representation and participation in elite universities. Included in the evaluation of access to elite universities for state comprehensive students are the full spectrum of schools

with different performances, resources and selectivity. It is therefore likely that the proportion of the quarter of students from these schools who attend Russell Group universities that are also WP students is much lower. Furthermore, as 60% of students from private schools attend some of the most prestigious universities, WP students who do make it to the same destination are part of an environment oversaturated with more privileged students. Over half of private school students attend the same 24 universities which belong to the Russell Group, meaning that these students are more likely to know other students in their graduating year, university community or in their course cohort. This creates a social disadvantage for WP students, likely contributing to issues and obstacles when negotiating "a sense of fit" (Fernando, Kenny, 2021, p. 134) at university. This is especially relevant to this research project, as the University of Warwick sits within the coveted Russell Group meaning that these phenomena are likely to have an impact on Warwick's WP community.

On this issue Abigail O'Brian also outlines that a social sense of fit or belonging is crucial for student experience, especially for WP students. O'Brian's focus is on WP decision making and support systems leading up to university, concluding that amongst other factors, geography of universities has a large impact on WP destinations (2022, p. 75). This suggestion refers to students who choose to attend universities closer to home so that they can live at home and save money, as echoed by some of O'Brian's interviewees (p. 203). This reinforces the fact that for many students, deciding to live on campus or in student accommodation is an extremely costly one, with risk factors concerning funding and budgeting involved. Although O'Brian's focus is on student decision making prior to university, this research does shed light on some of the context which may influence WP representation in on campus accommodation, as well as student experience of the service. O'Brian's research was completed as part of a doctorate course, and despite research such as this being frequently overlooked, O'Brian's thoroughness and contemporary focus only make their research more relevant to this project.

Mental Health

In other pools of research, many academics are focused on documenting and studying student experiences of mental health whilst at university, and how this may be impacted by university provided and student accommodation. Laura Sokal concludes that based on communication with students with anxiety disorders in Canada, universities should prioritise "**Accommodation versus adaptation**" (2016, p. 9). This suggests that students' mental health needs and consideration should be central and default to the structures of provided accommodation and the student renting process, rather than requested and fleeting alterations. This has an impact for WP students as they also have mental health needs which should be accommodated automatically, in order to facilitate a truly inclusive and safe environment, but also as a translatable sentiment. WP needs such as affordability, support and flexibility should be inherent to the structures of accommodation provided, in order to truly remove obstacles and feelings of difference from the university accommodation experience.

This is echoed in research conducted by Joanne D Worsley and colleagues at the University of Liverpool, which suggests that in the transitional environment of university accommodation "it is common for mental health problems to arise whilst students are acclimatising to their new environment." (2021, p. 1). During a focus group, students expressed the significant impact that accommodation itself can have on mental health:

"The design of accommodation spaces can have a really important impact: 'I think the actual accommodation is really modern and light and it makes me feel happier because I was thinking that a couple of my friends were in accommodation that was dingy and it would make you feel a bit depressed' (FG2 UOA p1)." (Worsley, 2021, p. 10)

This reflection of a student is easily relatable to the advertising images of some of Warwick's accommodations as seen in the introduction, as the more expensive accommodations are more modern and spacious than their cheaper counterparts. This student themselves is suggesting that there is a direct link between accommodation layout and aesthetics and student mental health and experiences of higher education. This is extremely pertinent to this research project, as WP students are less likely to be able to access the more modern, light and indeed expensive accommodation options on campus.

Accommodation and communities

Alongside the focus on various elements of student experience, there is also a large body of research concerned with university accommodations themselves, how they impact students and how the industry functions. Although writing about urban universities more specifically, Luisa Sotomayor and colleagues encapsulate some of the complexities of marketable higher education and its relationship with intersectionality:

> "Furthermore, scholarly work on the neoliberalization of higher education has insisted that, while universities cast images of diversity, globality and cosmopolitanism at a transnational level, their everyday practices and the micro-dynamics of campus life are often exclusionary and even oppressive to religious minorities, other-abled bodied, and ethnic and sexual minorities." (Sotomayor et al, 2022, p. 3)

Sotomayor's suggestion that "the micro-dynamics of campus life are often exclusionary" (2022, p. 3) is a sentiment at the heart of this research project, although Sotomayor does not identify WP or working class identity as an affected demographic. Here, it is argued that this superficial diversity and inclusion is connected to or even caused by the "neoliberalization of higher education" (Sotomayor et al, 2022, p. 3). This is referring to the transition of universities from simply institutions of education to businesses that function within a market, and sell the 'product' of degree qualifications and increased employability for graduates. As is suggested, this phenomena is the subject of much research, and provides important context for understanding the system of accommodation at the University of Warwick, and how the facilities are tied to the marketed idea of student life and experience.

Karen Wilkes addresses this with respect to the private university accommodation industry using theoretical analysis to comment on the sector and the impact of neoliberalization on higher education more generally. "[higher education's] shift from a space that offered the promise of social justice and contributions to society in the form of cultural and social value, to one that has been remodelled as a business enterprise governed by the interests of political and managerial elites. [...] The luxury student accommodation sector has developed within the neoliberal context, where traditional academic values of good teaching and critical scholarship are routinely undermined." (Wilkes, 2020, p. 255)

Here, Wilkes places neoliberal attitudes and practices in direct conflict with previous values and roles of higher education, echoing Sotomayor's outline of the contradictions within institutions. As a result of this pivot towards marketability, Wilkes identifies that "For those students who can afford it, they are able to create a desirable self-image and utilize their cultural and social capital to differentiate themselves from less 'enterprising' students" (2020, p. 257). As this project aims to establish, this idea can be translated onto on campus university provided accommodation, as students who cannot afford to "create a desirable self-image" (Wilkes, 202, p. 257) are at a disadvantage in this internal higher education system of social stratification. Regardless of this issue within universities, Carolyn Kagan outlines that nationally across the whole of the UK, representation of disadvantaged groups at university if a major issue: "At this time, in 2001, the participation rate for students under 21, from non-manual backgrounds, was 50%, whereas for students from manual backgrounds it was 10% (HEFCE 2006)." (Kagan et al, 2019, p. 54). Although these figures are not representative of university demographics in 2022, they are significant to a discussion of university accommodation. Projects which focus on building new or renovating old accommodations take years, from planning to completion, and so for many of the additions to campus accommodations, these statistics represent the demographics of students expected to live in these accommodations. This may have a correlation with the lack of affordable on campus accommodation, as only 2 decades ago many more students were likely to be able to afford more expensive accommodation options. This relates to the building holistic picture of university accommodation both existing externally of students' needs and artificially constructing class and social divisions on campus.

It is clear overall that an immense body of research exists on student experiences of higher education, including those of WP students, but not its specific relationship with university provided accommodation. Although researchers are evidently generally critical of the student accommodation sector, this comes from a more universal perspective, examining the present exploitation and failure to meet students' needs such as mental health support. In many of these studies and articles, translatable and pertinent conclusions are made about the duty of universities when meeting students' needs, but the central focus of these claims is not the specific impact of this on disadvantaged, WP student communities. Furthermore, research concerned with WP experiences specifically is largely focused on pre-university access to information and resources, and support through the application process rather than on the student experience whilst at these institutions. This is why, on a small scale, this project attempts to marry these 2 concerns to address the very real and pressing impacts of the system of university accommodation on WP students.

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Methodology

Aims

The aims of this project are to investigate students' experience of accommodation on University of Warwick's campus, and to establish if there is any correlation between these views and experiences and WP identity. Drawing from my personal experiences and interpretation of the literature surrounding this topic as well as Warwick's own selfpresentation online, I believe that WP students are disproportionately negatively affected by the facilities, affordability and social atmosphere of accommodation on campus. This project therefore intends to establish if this is the case for the wider student community, and to collect data which reveals any themes or correlations surrounding students' views and perceptions of different accommodations. The data collected is intended to highlight how accommodation on campus can impact student self-perception, and how this may disproportionately impact WP students.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was received from the Social Mobility Student Research Hub on behalf of the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) at University of Warwick. All methods were carried out in accordance with relevant guidelines and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

As the subject material may be inherently sensitive and even political for participants this was carefully considered during the ethical evaluation. The questions on the survey were all optional, with multiple choice questions also including a 'Prefer not to say' option. This was done to limit any emotional distress that may be caused to participants when asked questions about sensitive topics such as gender and their experiences of wellbeing on campus. During project design, questions about personal identity such as gender, tuition fee status and WP identity were considered necessary to facilitate data comparison. To be further considerate of these ethical issues, all data was collected anonymously and stored securely as per the HSSREC requirements.

Survey Design and Data Collection

The primary data collected for this project was collected through a digitally circulated survey, as can be seen in the Appendix. I created this survey using Qualtrics with a combination of multiple choice, Linkert-scale/ rating and written answer questions. Although many researchers investigating related topics, as outlined in the Literature Review, use less structured forms of data collection like interviews and focus groups, I decided that a survey was most suitable to meet my research aims. Due to the narrow focus of this project-specifically on students at the University of Warwick- and the limited time frame (6 months), collecting data via a survey would give me the most amount of data to collect and analyse. Furthermore, as this is an under-researched topic this project intends to provide a first look into students' views on accommodation and its relationship with WP identity. I therefore decided that a survey which could collect data on multiple key themes and concerns of more participants was more appropriate than methods that would provide more detail about specific students' insights like interviews.

The multiple-choice questions featured on the survey are included to provide context on the participants which facilitate the comparison of the data concerning participants' opinions. This includes the personal identity questions as, as well as which accommodation participants last stayed in, and which of their ranked choices that accommodation was. These questions help to establish what each participants' perspective is when commenting in more detail on different accommodations and their experiences of life on campus.

Likert-scale/ rating questions enabled the collection of data concerning key specific aspects of students' experience of accommodation. The first question of this style requires participants to rate to what extent they agree that they could afford and visualise themselves in any of the accommodations on campus. This question functions to collect quantitative data which demonstrates students' access to accommodation and would reveal any correlation between participants i responses to these statements and their identity as WP. Later in the survey, participants are asked to rate their experience of facilities, comfort, living with flatmates, belonging, RLT (Residential life Team) and wellbeing in the accommodation they last stayed in on campus. This question is designed to collect quantitative data on students' experience with key aspects of campus life, centring around the physical, practical space of the accommodation they last stayed in, as well as the social and institutional environment.

The qualitative data collected through his survey comes from participants' responses to written questions, recording their experiences of the accommodation they stayed in, the five focus accommodations, and their experience of others' comments on their accommodation. These questions aim to provide detail for the quantitative data collected elsewhere in the survey. Questions were asked separately about each of the focus accommodations to collect data which would enable a comparison of any correlations or themes between WP and non-WP responses, as well as any distinct themes about individual accommodation types. As these questions ask participants to review their experience of accommodation and of other students' views it was especially necessary for ethical reasons that these questions were optional for participants, as they may raise sensitive issues.

The accommodations selected to focus on during this project, as aforementioned, are Whitefields, Cryfield Standard, Rootes, Cryfield Townhouses and Bluebell. These accommodations were chosen to represent varying ranges of affordability, with Whitefields being the cheapest and Bluebell the most expensive. This range was also limited from the full selection offered at Warwick to make the amount of data collected more manageable, and to gather more detail about the most contrasting options.

Participants

This digital survey collected information from elective participants from various communities at the university. The survey was circulated via the WP Student Network, Social Mobility Student Research Hub, the Library Associate scheme community, WPSAG, and through various members of staff at the University of Warwick. The survey was open to participants from 16th May 2022 and was closed 30th June 2022. A total of 29 participants responded to the survey, with 27 participants answering any questions. This included 10 participants who identified as WP, 14 who identified as non-WP, 2 participants recorded they were not sure and one participant who chose not to answer that question. Although this sample size is limited and not representative of the whole university, it does serve as an insight into this issue for further research to expand on.

Data Analysis

The 2 participants who did not answer any questions were disregarded in the analysis of data. For the sake of comparison, non-WP participants were considered any who identified as non-WP, not sure or who chose not to answer.

Quantitative data was analysed using Qualtrics and tables and graphs created by myself using Microsoft Word and Excel. Qualtrics allowed the data to be filtered by WP and non-WP participant responses, calculating the mean of responses to the Linkert scale/ rating questions. Furthermore, inputting the quantitative data from these questions to column graphs where appropriate visually demonstrates the trends and disparities between the data sets. This is similarly demonstrated through box and whisker graphs, outlining any correlations in the data between WP and non-WP responses and demonstrating the medians of the data sets. Due to the limited sample size, more technical software for data analysis was not required.

The qualitative data collected from the survey was represented visually using word cloud diagrams (generated using www.wordclouds.com) and analysed using language analysis. To explore the meanings and implications of the language used in participants' qualitative responses I used my skills as a Literature student to exercise content and discourse analysis. This analysis focused on the meaning of the language used and its relation to the social context of the university and wider British society. A thematic analytical approach was also used to quantify the themes and patterns of participants' responses, especially to questions concerning the five focus accommodations to establish any trends that may represent the culture on campus. The word clouds function as a visual representation of the language used to describe different accommodations alongside the literary language analysis.

Methodological Evaluation

Although WP status was a vital aspect in data collection for this project, gender and tuition fee status were not as useful data sets due to the limited pool of participants. As a result, there was not enough representation of participants from different groups to establish whether a correlation of student experience based on these characteristics was present.

Findings

Quantitative Data

The survey recorded 29 responses in total from students at the University of Warwick, with 27 of those respondents answering any of the survey questions. The 2 participants who responded but did not answer any questions have been excluded from the data. The following table is a breakdown of the demographics of participants based on survey answers:

Question topic	Result
WP status	10 WP, 14 non-WP, 2 not sure, 1 no answer
Fee status	24 home fee paying status, 2 non-home fee paying status (international students), 1 no answer
Gender	7 male, 18 female, 1 prefer not to say, 1 no answer
Accommodation last stayed in	5 Whitefields, 5 Rootes, 2 Bluebell, 14 other, 1 no answer
Choice ranking of accommodation last stayed in	19 first choice, 1 second choice, 4 last choice, 2 none, 1 no answer

Item 10

For the sake of data comparison, apart from when referring to the WP status question, data representing answers from 'non-WP' participants includes participants who did not answer or answered 'not sure'.

Affordability and Self-Visualisation

The following details the median, mean and number of participants for the Likert scale/ rating questions that ask participants to rate their agreement with two statements out of ten: 'I could afford any of the accommodation on campus.' and 'I could visualise myself in any of the accommodation on campus.'.

	Total	WP	Non-WP	Higher Value
Median		4.375	4.142	WP
Mean	4.541	4.375	4.625	Non-WP
Participants	24	8	16	

I could afford any of the accommodation on campus.

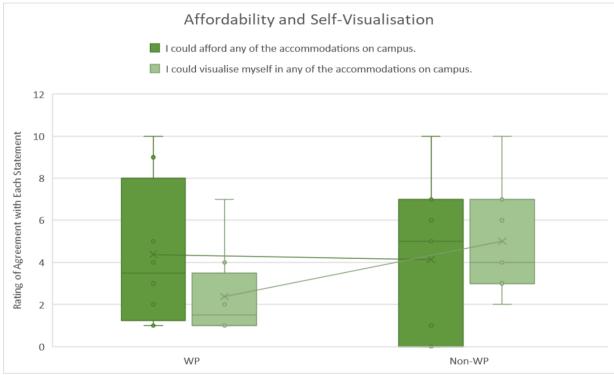
Item 11

	Total	WP	Non-WP	Higher Value
Median		2.375	5.0	Non-WP
Mean	3.833	2.375	4.563	Non-WP
Participants	24	8	16	

I could visualise myself in any of the accommodation on campus.

Item 12

This data suggests that students of both WP and non-WP identities feel that they can afford any accommodation on campus at Warwick, but that WP students are less likely to visualise themselves in any of these accommodations despite being able to afford them. This is presented visually in the box and whisker graph below:





As is demonstrated above, non-WP students are slightly less likely to feel that they can afford any accommodation on campus, which may be the manifestation of the extra support available to WP students. However, as can be seen via the trend lines across the graph, non-WP students were much more likely to report being able to visualise themselves in any of the accommodations on campus. As the values in the table Item 11 outline, the difference in median for affordability is 0.233. This means that between the data collected from the two groups, WP and non-WP, there was little overall difference in their responses to this statement on average. Whereas, the difference between the median as seen in Item 12 between the two groups for the second rating question is 2.188, meaning that non-WP students were on average rating their agreement with the statement two points higher. This is a notable difference suggesting that there is a correlation between WP identity and a lower self-reported ability to visualise themselves in any accommodation on campus.

Accommodation Rating

The following tables represent data collected from question 11, which asked participants to rate their experience of the following: facilities, comfort, living with flatmates, belonging, RLT (Resident Life Team) and wellbeing.

	Total	WP	Non-WP	Higher Value
Median		7.000	6.500	WP
Mean	6.423	7.100	6.000	WP
Participants	26	10	16	
Item 14	•			

Facilities

Comfort

	Total	WP	Non-WP	Higher Value
Median		5.000	6.500	Non-WP
Mean	5.731	5.800	5.688	WP
Participants	26	10	16	

Item 15

Living with flatmates

	Total	WP	Non-WP	Higher Value
Median		4.000	6.500	Non-WP
Mean	5.625	5.000	5.938	Non-WP
Participants	24	8	16	

Item 16

Belonging

	Total	WP	Non-WP	Higher Value
Median		5.000	6.000	Non-WP
Mean	5.478	5.000	5.688	Non-WP
Participants	23	7	16	

Item 17

RLT

	Total	WP	Non-WP	Higher Value
Median		5.000	3.000	WP
Mean	4.000	4.333	3.786	WP
Participants	23	9	14	

Item 18

Wellbeing

	Total	WP	Non-WP	Higher Value
Median		5.000	5.500	Non-WP
Mean	4.682	4.444	4.846	Non-WP
Participants	22	9	13	

Item 19

As demonstrated in the above, WP participants had higher rating on average (based on the median of the data collected) for facilities and experience of RLT, whereas Non-WP scored their experience of comfort, living with flatmates, belonging and wellbeing higher. Due to the fact that WP participants on average scored 2 categories higher on average makes it more difficult to definitively say that there is a correlation overall between demographics and experience of accommodation as a whole. However, it can be said that there is a clear correlation between WP identity and lower ratings of 4 of the categories. It is also significant that these 4 categories are concerned with social and personal aspects of experience of accommodation, whereas facilities and experience of RLT are more concerned with physical and institutional structure. Therefore, based on this data it can be concluded that WP students are more likely to score social and personal aspects of their experience of accommodation lower than Non-WP students.

Qualitative Data

For qualitative questions, key words and phrases will be presented rather than entire answers as many participants generously wrote in detail about their experiences and perspectives. Each bullet point represents a different participants' response.

Participants were asked to describe the accommodation they last stayed in on campus. The following details participants' answers divided by WP status.

WP Answers

- 1. Decent, but minimal
- 2. Very mid-range [...] It was quite run down, but nice on the outside- a strange balance.
- 3. Comfortable but expensive
- 4. Unsociable
- 5. Perfect! except all the fire alarms!
- 6. Not very modern. Too expensive.

- 7. Physically good quality but lonely
- 8. Outdated, very old
- 9. A happy medium
- 10. Far away and cheap, felt disconnected from campus

Non-WP Answers

- 1. Just fine
- 2. Cheap and good location
- 3. Comfortable
- 4. New and nice facilities
- 5. Communal
- 6. Slightly better give[n] the ratio of the price and quality
- 7. Worn and cramped
- 8. Well-maintained

As seen above there is a wide range of attitudes and sentiments presented in participants' responses concerning the accommodation they last stayed in on campus, reflecting the different types and students' different perspectives. Participants were also asked to describe each of the focus accommodations, as presented here followed by illustrative word clouds of frequently used words and phrases (using www.worldcloud.com).

Whitefields

- 1. Unusual, small and widely mocked
- 2. ugly from outside
- 3. Nice close and very communal living but it was always too hot and quite outdated.
- 4. Cramped, if not cosy
- 5. Cheap and not well maintained
- 6. Desolate
- 7. 'Shitefields' [...] very small and isolating despite being on the central part of campus.
- 8. Fantastic
- 9. Perfect
- 10. cheap, small, good location
- 11. Not suitable
- 12. A little basic but close to central campus.
- 13. pretty little houses
- 14. awkward layout
- 15. architecturally interesting
- 16. cosy, calm
- 17. Small
- 18. small, friendly
- 19. outlying option due to its unusual structure.
- 20. Old, dated, central location
- 21. small, rundown



Item 20 (Whitefields word cloud)

Cryfield Standard

- 1. Average, good study space
- 2. don't know
- 3. Standard
- 4. decent
- 5. hostel
- 6. Sociable, slightly dated, but spacious
- 7. decent
- 8. Decent, but the corridors are very narrow
- Awful. Literally a prison design, always cramped and dirty [...] Very social (sometimes) and had a great view of the better accommodation opposite. I heard several cases of Standard students egging Townhouses and it 'ruining' the Townhouses' view.
- 10. Average joy
- 11. Far out
- 12. It's alright nothing special tbh
- 13. the corridors are claustrophobic
- 14. Feels cramped but can see it being quite fun.



Item 21 (Cryfield Standard word cloud)

Rootes

- 1. big, cheap and connected
- 2. Busy, loud
- 3. loud, parties
- 4. Chaotic, busy, known for parties.
- 5. I really enjoyed Rootes- I liked that there were lots of people
- 6. Worn and cramped
- 7. Busy
- 8. time capsule
- 9. sociable
- 10. noisy
- 11. Loud and sociable, but slightly intimidating!
- 12. Fun, affordable, social, good location
- 13. Fun
- 14. Horrible.
- 15. Large
- 16. bare minimum
- 17. A bit of a cesspit. I heard about rats constantly, ceiling tiles caving in, a lot of the people were taking drugs in public... The party central of campus and it shows as I never heard Rootes being quiet.
- 18. Ugly
- 19. Party place
- 20. Noisy and disruptive
- 21. Some flats had incidents of rats in them, but mine was nice just not like luxurious
- 22. apparently had great parties
- 23. Known for its poor standards. Mould, rats and parties
- 24. probably noisy.



Item 22 (Rootes word cloud)

Cryfield Townhouses

- 1. expensive, new
- 2. Posh, modern, new, cinema room
- 3. Modern
- 4. nice, exclusive
- 5. Fancy, new.
- 6. Very nice
- 7. haha way too fancy
- 8. fancy
- 9. unsociable as bedrooms are very isolated
- 10. unique design that connect residences living there
- 11. Close to central campus, modern, and homely
- 12. Well furnished
- 13. expensive, new, really nice
- 14. Debauched
- 15. Very fancy, the sofas and tv are very nice
- 16. I always liked to watch the TV through the window [...] you always see them judging you from the window. Can't even imagine what the rooms are like as I was never allowed inside as I literally didn't know anyone in the accommodation.
- 17. Far away
- 18. Frat house
- 19. Really fancy, nice looking as well
- 20. nice
- 21. In my opinion the nicest looking buildings.



Item 23 (Cryfield Townhouses word cloud)

Bluebell

- 1. ridiculously expensive
- 2. Posh, exclusive
- 3. no community
- 4. Fancy, private, cold.
- 5. Posh
- 6. posh
- 7. not worth it
- 8. posh, expensive
- 9. expensive
- 10. Expensive, aesthetically pleasing, and 'posh'.
- 11. Posh
- 12. expensive, posh



Item 24 (Bluebell word cloud)

The final written answer question asked participants to relay what they heard from others about the accommodation they last stayed in on campus, trying to ascertain any other stereotypes about accommodations as well as their impact on students:

- 1. far away, essentially off campus, cheap
- 2. Convenient
- 3. its for rich people
- 4. They didn't enjoy it. Didn't feel free, felt restricted by lots of rules. It was too expensive
- 5. People liked it in general
- 6. it's the "party accommodation", "noisy", "riot"
- 7. That it's horrible
- 8. not what they expected
- 9. not good value
- 10. westwood is often said to be far away
- 11. generally good, just a bit far away
- 12. That Arthur Vick is 'boring' and antisocial!
- 13. They also enjoyed it
- 14. party accomodation
- 15. That is is deemed the worst because it is the cheapest
- 16. That it's the same as arthur vick and that it's good if you like partying
- 17. Dead
- 18. Poor quality
- 19. It's literally called shite-fields I feel like that expresses other opinions towards whitefeilds
- 20. I've heard that Rootes is a place for hardcore partying and is dirty. They also said not to take your shoes or socks off because of the dirt inherent to Rootes.
- 21. they think it's nice, quite crowded

- 22. nice but lacked space
- 23. "Shitefields", and people asking if it's bad, some in a less leading way than others.

Analysis

Quantitative Data

As aforementioned, the first set of quantitative data questions on the survey demonstrated that there is a correlation between WP identity and a lower self-reported rate of students visualising themselves in any of the accommodation on campus. The difference in participants rating that agreement with the statement 'I could afford any of the accommodation on campus' is minute (0.231 in median), with WP students reporting slightly higher agreement (Item 11). However, Non-WP students reported being able to visualise themselves in any of the accommodations much higher on average (5.000 versus 2.375 for WP students, a difference of 2.625 in median) (Item 12). This is in spite of this pool of Non-WP participants being just as if not slightly less able to afford these accommodations as WP students. This clearly demonstrates that within this small pool of participants, there is a clear correlation between WP identity and a lack of sense of belonging in the accommodation on campus at the University of Warwick. Alongside these disparities, the average rating of agreement of all participants was low, and demonstrates the unaffordability and exclusivity of on campus accommodation. The data collected by these questions provides a basis for analysis of the qualitative data collected by the survey, as well as echoing Abigail O'Brian's suggestion that WP students struggle to "negotiate" a sense of belonging in higher education (2022, p. 75).

Furthermore, Non-WP participants rated their experience of comfort, living with flatmates, belonging and wellbeing higher on average, with WP students rating facilities and experience of RLT higher. It is unexpected that WP students would rate their experience of any of these categories higher, given the exclusivity of the environment and the sentiments expressed that will be elaborated shortly. However, a common theme with the elements rated higher by Non-WP students is that they are social and personal elements of the experience of living in accommodation. It may be that WP students were more easily satisfied by the accommodation facilities, focused on practicality, than what may be the higher expectations of Non-WP students. There are similar possible explanations as to why WP students would rate their experience of RLT (on campus accommodation support) higher, although more investigation would be required to ascertain the definitive explanation. Overall, it is significant that WP students on average rated their experience of emotive and social aspects of accommodation lower, suggesting that there is a correlation between WP identity and social hardships within on campus accommodation.

Qualitative Data

As the pool of participants was limited, not all 5 of the focus accommodations were represented by participants of either WP or Non-WP identity. As a result, the data collected about students' reflection on the accommodation they last stayed in on campus cannot fairly be compared between the 2 groups, but is included nonetheless in the findings to represent some of the experiences and sentiments of students overall.

The qualitative data collected concerning the 5 focus accommodations however are useful in revealing the culture on campus and the different stereotypes of accommodations and the 'types' of students that they house. Although as aforementioned, all the students on average rated that they could afford any accommodation to a similar degree, as different

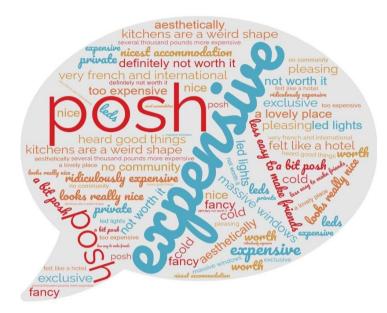
accommodations have varying prices, cheaper accommodations are therefore associated with students with less funding, and vice versa with expensive accommodations.

The most frequently used word by participants to describe Whitefields accommodation was "small", followed by the label of "cheap". This connotes a sense of being cramped and uncomfortable, intensified by participants' use of words and phrases such as "desolate", "awkward layout" and "Not suitable". When the label of "cheap" is used alongside this sense of negativity and claustrophobia, this too seems not to be a statement of fact on the price, but a qualitative judgement of the lack of quality of the accommodation. Furthermore, the derogatory and unflattering nickname "Shitefields" which recurs in participants answers to multiple questions suggests that the accommodation is well known for being subpar and inadequate at best. It is also significant that this is the only nickname of any accommodation mentioned in any of the participants' answers, setting it apart not just on price but in the social dynamics of campus life also. As Whitefields represents the most affordable accommodation option on campus, it is reasonable that it is associated with students with less funding, even if WP students span across most accommodation types. As a result, these stereotypes and associations mean that students with less funding, WP students or students experiencing financial challenges are therefore associated and expected to live in these "desolate" conditions. It is widely accepted that language and beliefs held by social groups have an impact on individuals' opinions and sense of self, which makes this association and relationship between cheap accommodation and negativity so dangerous for students', especially WP students' sense of belonging at Warwick.

In direct contrast to this, the most frequently used words to describe Bluebell accommodation were "expensive" and "posh". There is a negative tone in these answers too, as many participants expressed that they think this accommodation type is overpriced. As Karen Wilkes outlines however, this exclusivity, high price and impressive facilities provided allow residents who can afford it to cultivate a "desirable self-image" (2020, p. 257) that is clearly far removed from the atmosphere of "Shitefields". Reproduced below is the world cloud demonstrating these stereotypes and associations visually for these 2 opposing accommodation options:



Item 20 (Reproduced)



Item 24 (Reproduced)

These images are presented within a speech bubble to represent the prevalence and impact of these associations within campus social life and structures. It is these stereotypes and assumptions that surround students throughout their experience of staying in on campus accommodation. Furthermore, as the slightly cheaper Cryfield Townhouses boasts associations with being "fancy", "modern" and "new" this sense of criticism seems uniquely applied to Bluebell. This may be due to elements of resentment and even jealousy of the luxurious nature of these accommodations compared to other more modest options, only intensified by the evident social stratification on campus. This sentiment is echoed by participants' comments of cheaper accommodation groups "egging" Cryfield Townhouses, as well as one student suggesting that "you always see them judging you from the [Cryfield Townhouses'] window". This reveals that the system of accommodation at the University of Warwick, which provides vastly different options by price and aesthetic as seen in the introduction, have created clear divisions riddled with resentment, mistrust and shame. This is an unhealthy social dynamic for all students, but as the correlation of a lack of self-visualisation and belonging, and WP identity demonstrates, this is having a disproportionately negative impact on students most in need of inclusiveness and welcome. WP students are often some of the first to attend university in their family, and as aforementioned are also in an environment oversaturated with more privileged students (Fernando, Kenny, 2021, p. 134), meaning that these negative associations may cause major blow to their sense of belonging at university. The idea of 'imposter syndrome' frequently appears in discourse surrounding student experience, and only makes this issue of accommodation and self-perception more significant.

These are not the only themes and stereotypes to arise from the qualitative questions within the survey, also revealed was the intimidating or even dangerous culture of 'partying' associated with Rootes accommodation. Participants confessed associations of Rootes as "loud", full of "parties" and riddled with a rat infestation. This

"party central of campus" has an evidently unique stereotype amongst the student community, which sits as another example of the social stratification and vast perceived differences between accommodations and their residents.

Although the question specifically about what participants heard others say about the accommodation they last stayed in on campus suffers from the small pool of participants, the overall impression is extremely negative. The participant responses range from "part accommodation" and "its for rich people" to "it's horrible" with a "dirt inherent" to the accommodation. This reflects an appalling on campus culture of negativity, stereotypes and misinformation, manifesting in students' experiences and self-perception throughout their time at university.

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Conclusion

It is evident that from this data arises 2 issues with on campus accommodation at the University of Warwick: that WP students have disproportionately negative experiences of accommodation, and do not feel an unburdened sense of belonging at the university, and that there are deeply rooted and troubling stereotypes and social stratifications present on campus. As there is a clear correlation between WP identity and lower ratings of social facets of accommodation, this is clearly a pertinent WP and university wide issue, that must be dealt with in its specifics and complexity independent of other WP initiatives and concerns. More generally, this project has undoubtedly shown that the culture of the undergraduate community at the university is splintered, reflecting and magnifying society-wide divisions in a space which should belong to all students equally. There were many limitations to the project, such as time frame and pool of participants, but the data collected clearly identifies the crucial need for research with wider reach and depth into the topic. It is for these reasons that the following recommendations are given.

Recommendations

- All accommodations need to be made more affordable to students, or more financial support given to increase the choices available to students. Increased funding specifically to WP students may also help to make WP students feel valued by the university.
- 2. The differences and disparities between accommodations provided need to be narrowed. More affordable accommodation options should not come at the added cost of unpleasant living conditions or communities. This would include updating facilities and keeping students social dynamics in mind when updating or building accommodation, like less narrow, isolating and daunting corridors.
- 3. The Warwick Scholars programme, supporting students before university all the way to graduation from the local area may also be a useful framework to support WP students as a whole. This would provide funding, a structured programme of support and investment in students, as well as paid opportunities to mentor other students to support WP students financially and professionally. This may help to engage WP students beyond individuals and groups who are confident and frequently speak about their experiences, to help a larger number of WP students.
- 4. If all accommodations were made similar or the same prices, with similar or the same facilities and features then an optionless system that appoints students accommodation allocations at random would help to destratify accommodation communities. This radical change could only come after extensive remodelling to many accommodations, and dramatic changes in price, but would make for a more equal campus community.
- 5. Although issues such as social divisions are a significant aspect of many disciplines and modules alike, more effort can be made to cover these issues for all students to try to combat the tensions and stereotypes evidently prevalent. Due to the extent of

this issue, it is clear that this message needs to be unignorably delivered, in a way that students will find receptive.

6. Finally, going forward there evidently needs to be much more research on the relationship between accommodation and student experience and how that impacts WP communities specifically, both within and outside of the University of Warwick. As this small-scale project demonstrates, there are many deeply rooted issues that need to be rectified to improve all students' experiences, and most of all to support and welcome WP students, who have fairly earned their place within the institution and should be valued as such.

Appendix

Survey questions and consent declaration

Social Mobility Research Hub Project (OC)

Consent Study Title: An Exploration of the Relationship Between Physical Spaces and Accommodation on Campus and Student Experience.

Investigators: Olivia Collins, supervised by Aïcha Hadji-Sonni, Dr Damien Homer and Dr Tammy Thiele

This is a student research project. The research will seek to generate an understanding of the relationship between student experience and University campus accommodation, and whether this is impacted by identity factors such as widening participation status. This student research project is funded by the Social Mobility Research Hub at the University of Warwick. Your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time, and for any reason, simply by closing your browser. No identifiable data will be collected from you as part of this study. This means that once your responses have been submitted to the research team, it will not be possible to withdraw this data as your individual responses cannot be identified. Data will be securely stored on University of Warwick OneDrive and will be processed only for the purpose of scientific analysis. Access to the data will be restricted to the investigators listed above. Summaries may be presented at conferences and included in scientific publications. Data will be reviewed on completion of the research, in line with the University of Warwick data retention policy. Please refer to the University of Warwick Research Privacy Notice which is available here:

https://warwick.ac.uk/services/idc/dataprotection/privacynotices/researchprivacynotice or by contacting the Information and Data Compliance Team at GDPR@warwick.ac.uk. This study has been reviewed and given ethical approval by the Student Mobility Research Hub. If you require further information, please contact tammy.thiele@warwick.ac.uk

Who should I contact if I wish to make a complaint? Any complaint should be addressed to the person below, who is a senior University of Warwick official entirely independent of this study: Jane Prewett (Head of Research Governance) Research & Impact Services University House University of Warwick Coventry CV4 8UW Email: researchgovernance@warwick.ac.uk Tel: 024 76 522746. If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer, Anjeli Bajaj, Information and Data Director who will investigate the matter: DPO@warwick.ac.uk. If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are processing your personal data in a way that is not lawful you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Thank you for taking the time to read this Participant Information Leaflet.

Do you consent to take part in this study by filling out the questionnaire below?

• Yes (1)

• No (2)

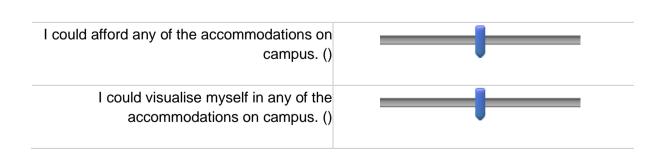
Q1 Which accommodation did you last stay in on campus?

- Whitefields (1)
- Rootes (2)
- Bluebell (3)
- Cryfield Standard (4)
- Cryfield Townhouses (5)
- None (6)
- \circ Other (7)

Q2 Which of your choices was the last accommodation you stayed in on campus?

- First Choice (1)
- Second Choice (2)
- Last Choice (3)
- None (4)

Q3 Please rate each statement from 1 (totally Disagree) to 10 (totally Agree).



0

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q4 How would you describe the accommodation you last stayed in on campus?

Q5 How would you describe Whitefields?

Q6 How would you describe Rootes?

Q7 How would you describe Bluebell?

Q8 How would you describe Cryfield Standard?

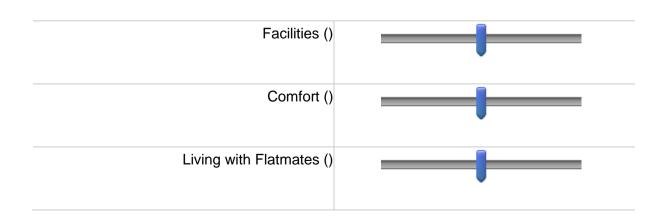
Q9 How would you describe Cryfield Townhouses?

Q10 What have you heard from others about the accommodation you last stayed in on campus?

Q11 Please score your experience of the following aspects of the last accommodation you stayed in on campus, with 0 being the lowest score and 10 being the highest score.

0

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Belonging ()	
University Support and RLT (Residential Life Team) ()	
Wellbeing ()	

Q12 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary (3)
- Other (4)
- Prefer not to say (5)

Q13 Are you a UK (Home Fee) student?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- International Student (3)
- \circ Other (4)
- Prefer not to say (5)

Q14 Are you a widening participation (under-represented) student?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- \circ Unsure (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

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