

# Do LSE students experience a school community beyond the boundaries of campus?

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See this project presented by the researcher: [https://youtu.be/\\_10o\\_4GRzeM](https://youtu.be/_10o_4GRzeM)  
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## Background

For students either not sold on the benefits of, or not able to, live in LSE accommodation, London is a complex place to navigate, with this process of moving being made all the more daunting by the overwhelming amount of conflicting information available online. Once having passed this confusing stage and settled into a new flat however, certainly in my experience the next question was, does anyone at LSE live near me? There is at present no official route through which students not living in LSE accommodation are able to meet those living nearby them, and so, this project has sought to answer the question, do LSE students experience a School community beyond the boundaries of campus? This notion of a School community has been extended in this project to also encompass how supported students have felt by the School in their experience of private renting.

## Literature Review

Whilst platforms such as *Meetup* offer a fantastic space through which to connect with people of similar interests, previous Change Makers studies have demonstrated that being connected with other LSE students is important to feeling integrated into the LSE community (Zazzarino, et al., 2020). As the Covid-19 pandemic has left students feeling more isolated than ever (Jones & Cooper, 2020), finding ways to connect students in local areas could foster relationships that are practically and geographically easier to develop and maintain. With regards to private renting, whilst LSE currently offers the opportunity for students to use the School as a guarantor, as well as offering students a place to stay whilst they search for a flat, there is little in the way of direct guidance on private renting. In contrast, Kings College London (KCL) has identified six areas most popular amongst their students who privately rent (Kings College London, 2018), and UAL has gone even further, offering detailed guides on their students' favourite locations (UAL, 2020). The University of London Housing Services also offers a fantastic Housing Guide, that covers how to navigate London's private rental market and where to seek advice, which LSE does advertise (University of London, 2021).

## Methodology

My first method of data collection was a survey, which I conducted using Qualtrics. There were three main themes across the questions I asked in this survey, which covered: (i) where the respondents lived and why, (ii) attitudes towards the LSE Housing Office, and (iii) whether they experienced a sense of LSE community within their local area. Questions covered both a multiple-choice answer format and a free-type format, depending on what was being asked. I received 132 responses to my survey, with this demographic including

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both undergraduate and postgraduate students. From this survey, I then recruited participants to focus groups. As a wealth of data had already emerged within the survey, I decided that two focus groups were enough to glean the findings that I needed. All of my focus group participants were postgraduate students, comprising of six females and three males. Each also lived in privately rented accommodation, and although the majority were living in Zone 1 and Zone 2, one participant lived in Zone 4. I then roughly transcribed these focus group discussions and used thematic analysis to draw out the key findings of both the survey and focus group data.

## Key Findings

### 1. LSE students are dispersed across London

- I. Whilst a large portion of respondents to the survey were based in the Boroughs of Camden, Islington and Tower Hamlets, many more were spread across London, as can be seen on **Figure 1**.
- II. Those further away from campus reported that they have sometimes been unable to attend/felt excluded from social events due to the additional time and monetary cost travelling to campus incurred.
  - a. *"... between uni work and my job... I just don't have the time to keep travelling into campus when I want to see people..."* - Focus Group



Figure 1- Heat Map of Where LSE Students Live

### 2. LSE does not currently provide adequate support to those privately renting in London

- I. 94% of respondents reported that they did not use LSE's services for information regarding private accommodation.
  - a. Students either did not know these services existed or they did not find them useful.
  - b. *"I wasn't aware that they offered any help at all..."* – Survey
- II. Participants reported that they were not adequately supported in deciding where to live, with the focus group data outlining that rental prices and more information on transport links and local amenities would have been useful information to know.
  - a. Participants valued the advice of other students, particularly with regards to where to live, over that of staff.
  - b. Whilst the London Rents Map does offer guidance on rental prices, it does not offer guidance on what to expect at different rental costs, e.g. the additional cost of a living room.
- III. International students in particular reported that LSE did not do enough to support them when navigating the London housing market, with many finding this process complicated.
  - a. Most participants were also not aware of the UoL Private Housing Guide.
  - b. *"I'd heard before coming here that you have to like a broker or something to handle you finding a house and stuff... you have to pay a fee... and that was just"*

*like not the case, so, I think myths and stuff should be handled because it's really confusing..."* – Focus Group

### 3. The majority of students in privately rented accommodation do not live with other LSE Students.

- I. 61% of respondents did not live with other LSE students
- II. For those that did, however, they had come to this arrangement in a variety of ways.
  - a. Whilst the overwhelming majority of these, at 69%, were through friends, they were also organised on informal platforms, with 19% of these having been created through social media.
- III. Participants noted a lack of support in finding other LSE students to rent accommodation with, lamenting the lack of a more formal system through which such arrangements could be made.
  - a. *"I did try and find other students to live with before I moved, but it just seemed impossible, so I went through SpareRoom instead..."* – Focus Group

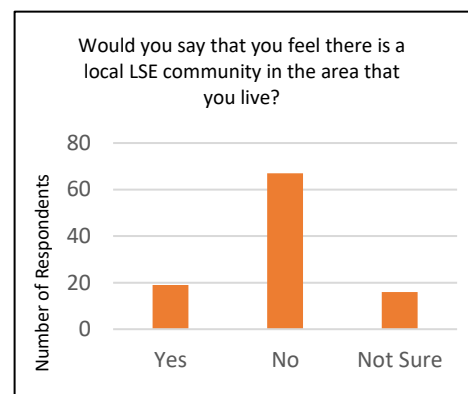


Figure 2- Survey Response

### 4. Whilst many LSE students do meet up with other students in their local areas, they overwhelmingly report that they do not experience an LSE community beyond campus.

- I. An encouraging 55% of respondents reported being in contact with other LSE students in their local area, of which they had formed these friendships in a variety of ways.
  - a. The majority of these were through seminars and/or lectures, with 47% of respondents reporting this.
- II. However, **figure 2** demonstrates that a massive 64% of respondents reported that they do not feel that there is a local LSE community where they live, and an additional 82% of respondents reported that they would like to be able to meet more/other LSE students in their local area.
- III. Participants noted that they were not able to meet other LSE students in their local area, with many suggesting that their experience at LSE would have benefitted from being able to do so.
  - a. *"I would love to meet other LSE students in Lewisham. I don't know if there are any."* - Survey
  - b. *"Compared to my undergrad in a much smaller city, it's sometimes been a bit isolating this year just cause everyone I've made friends with is so far away..."* – Focus Group

## Recommendations

### 1. Private Renting Support

- I. LSE should improve how they advertise the private housing guidance that they already offer.
- II. LSE, most likely the housing service, should set up a blog/guide that advises new students on what they need to know about living in London.
  - a. This should be contributed to by students, as well as staff.
  - b. It ought to lay out a guide to the different areas of London, with important information to include being what transport links there are, what the average rental prices are and what the local amenities are.
  - c. There also ought to be a “myth-busting” section of the blog/guide, that helps advise on what to expect in the rental process and what they should avoid or be aware of.
- III. LSE should appoint Alumni Reps for each course, which will be available to be contacted for advice about living in London.
- IV. The LSE Housing Service should set up online Q&A Sessions across August that advise incoming students on privately renting in London.
- V. LSE ought to create an official platform through which LSE students can connect prior to moving to London, so that shared rental arrangements can be formed.

### 2. Supporting LSE Local Communities

- I. LSE should draw on the model of the LSE Alumni Network, which consists of ‘hubs’ that are ran by a team of volunteers, by setting up London ‘hubs’ for current students.
  - a. I recommend that there is a hub in both North and South London.
  - b. Each hub will have appointed student ‘reps’.
  - c. These ‘reps’ will run formally organised events, as well as set up an informal group chat, so students will have the opportunity to organically meet up too.
  - d. It’s important that events are accessible, so for example, there ought to be events without alcohol involved. The location of events should also move around, so the same individuals aren’t always travelling further than others, even within the same ‘hub’.
  - e. Some of these formal events should explore local areas, particularly at the beginning of the year, so that new students are able to become familiar with their new environment in the company of others.
- II. LSE should continue to collect and analyse data that tracks which London boroughs are popular for LSE students to live in, with such information being made available to incoming students.