

Project Aims:

1. Uncover students in halls of residence's sustainability practices and perspectives on sustainability.
2. Understand UCL's institutional perspective and operationalisation of sustainable practices in halls of residence.
3. Explore the relationship between residents of UCL accommodation and the institution of UCL, in terms of sustainability perspectives and engagement.

"Constant recycling of the student body makes sustainable continuity challenging" - UCL sustainability team, 2022

Methods:

- **Participant observation:** we collated a sample of students from intercollegiate, and private UCL accommodation, as well as UCL staff.
- **We contacted:**
 - UCL sustainability and UCL accommodation teams.
 - Various societies (Art and climate action)
 - Student participants: resulting in snowball sampling.
- **Data was gathered through:**
 - Informal meetings in student halls to observe and discuss sustainability practices.
 - Observation in halls: kitchens, hallways, laundry rooms, rubbish areas and communal spaces.
 - Online meetings with the responsive UCL sustainability representatives.
 - Research of UCL's online published sustainability practices, initiatives, and statement.

"I'm just disappointed in UCL [...] the stats don't add up" - 1st Year Undergraduate Student, 2022

FINDING 1: Institutional claims of high sustainability appear to be unfounded in Student accommodation. - Institutional greenwashing?

➤ At an institutional level:

- UCL accommodation have no budget for sustainability practices.
- No realistic sustainability strategy resulting in the need for 'quick fixes'
- Distinct lack of posters, see fig 1.

➤ Observation of student halls along with testimonies:

- Students' report that it is easier to be sustainable at home.
- No composting facilities.
- Intercollegiate hall bins were unmarked; not allowing for recycling.

➤ Students also reported their own failings with sustainability:

- Participants confessed to not separating their rubbish appropriately.
- Distinct lack of communal living, with large amounts of waste products, e.g., multiple partially used oil and washing up liquid bottles.



Fig 1: Example of the hidden sustainability posters in UCL.

FINDING 2: There is a conflict of expectation between students and the institution:

➤ Institutional (Interviewed UCL staff members):

- Providing the tools to be sustainable only goes so far if students are not interacting with implemented initiatives.
- The recycling of students means that the passing down of sustainable practices between cohorts is an obstacle.
- Not enough students provide feedback from which to guide policies.

➤ Students:

- Feel that most of the sustainability commitments lie with UCL.
- Halls is often the first-time students are living independently. An International student interlocutor noted this responsibility – in that there were differing sustainability practices in their home country to the UK.
- Expectation of UCL being responsible for sustainability practices also stems from the posters in the accommodation.

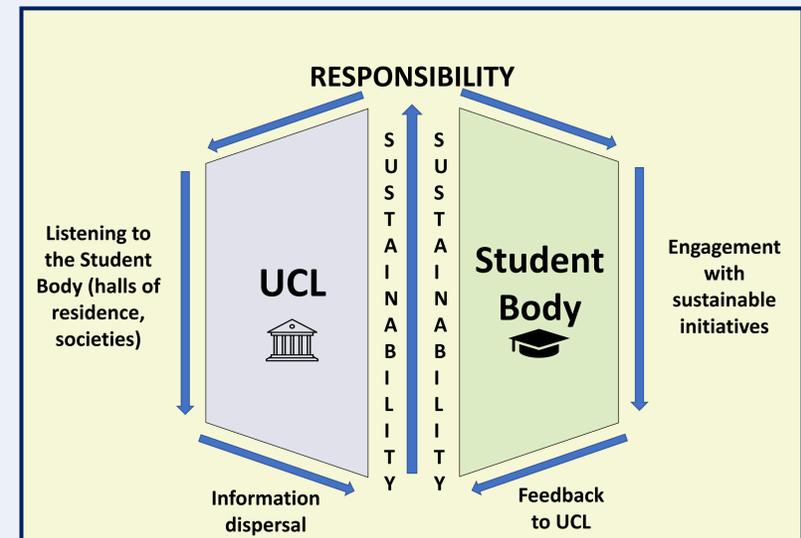


Figure 2: UCL and students collective aim of sustainability is separated by the diverging ideas of responsibility

Reflection on what our data revealed :

- Accommodation team concerned that students may not have the same ideas of what is 'sustainable'.
 - UCL can see what students are doing, but students cannot easily see UCL's actions: Perceived power imbalance.
- Student collaborators: there was a sense of helplessness as they felt it was them alone against UCL as an institution.
- Our observations leave more to be desired regarding sustainability initiatives.



- Should reveal the true and long-term efforts of sustainability to reduce quick fix solutions.
- Update Moodle courses.

- Self-educate on sustainability.
- Put more effort into creating and maintaining sustainable communities.

Both bodies need to improve communication and share responsibility

Future direction for research:

- Research more the first-time experiences of students living alone in halls.
- Look more into improvements that the University can make, e.g., social media for halls.