

Evaluating Resident and Client Satisfaction in Acorn of London's Housing

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Abstract

Acorn of London is a housing company that provides private housing to many university students traveling and staying within London. The goal of this project was to work with Acorn, its clients, and residents to provide Acorn with recommendations on how to improve client satisfaction. By surveying residents in Acorn's properties and interviewing clients affiliated with universities who book for large student groups, we were able to determine Acorn's strengths and areas it could improve upon. Based on these findings, we recommend Acorn make improvements to the flat turnover process, improvements to its student orientation, and renovate its Crawford Passage and Baker's Row flats. Additionally, we recommend Acorn introduce a client affairs position and implement a digital feedback survey for future use.

Executive Summary

When studying abroad, international university students have two options for housing: to live on-campus or off-campus. With the increase in study abroad programs and number of students in these programs, many universities are unable to provide housing to their students, international or otherwise. When international students cannot live on campus, outside housing providers step in to offer housing. In London specifically, purpose-built student accommodation (PBSAs) and housing in multiple occupancy (HMOs) are two of the major types of student housing to choose from.

In this project, we worked with a housing company that offers HMO, Acorn of London (Acorn). Acorn is a housing company that has been operating for over 40 years and has over 300 flats available. The company's target market consists primarily of American university students.

The goal of this project is to investigate and evaluate client residential experiences and opinions as they relate to Acorn's housing services to develop recommendations Acorn can implement to improve its provided services, amenities, and marketing strategies. These recommendations were developed through four main objectives:

1. Collect feedback from residents to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve client experience
2. Collect feedback from university officials to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve client experience
3. Collect and analyze information on competing companies in Acorn's market in order to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve its business
4. Create suggestions Acorn can use to improve its own feedback survey to make proactive changes to its housing model

To gather feedback, a survey, several interviews, and a focus group were administered. The 12-question survey was distributed to current residents of Acorn's properties via QR code or anonymous link using the survey platform Qualtrics. The survey had a total of 88 responses from across 5 of Acorn's properties. The survey asked residents to rate their satisfaction with different aspects of the accommodation, as well as the option to provide comments explaining why they gave these ratings. The team also interviewed 5 university officials, 2 agents that book for universities, and 1 independent resident who booked with Acorn. These interviews focused on client information, priorities when selecting housing, common feedback from residents, and the booking experience. The focus group consisted of 3 current Acorn residents and focused on getting ideas and recommendations from residents as to how Acorn could improve satisfaction.

Additionally, the team collected data about several other housing companies in London and compiled this data in order to understand how Acorn compares to these companies. This data was aggregated into a spreadsheet and grouped into categories such as the location of the buildings, number of beds per room, minimum length of stay, as well as other relevant information.

Lastly, the team conducted research into different digital survey distribution platforms Acorn could use for its new resident feedback survey. Acorn's prior survey was examined along with the survey mentioned above in order to determine what questions were the most effective and should be asked on Acorn's new survey.

Using the data collected from the above methods, the following 14 major findings were created:

Finding 1: The primary factors that make Acorn excel as a housing company are location and the option of short stay

95.2% of survey respondents were satisfied with the flat location. 7 of 8 clients needed Acorn's short-term stay options.

Finding 2: Housing location confirmation is concerning to clients

5 out of 8 of our interviewees, specifically larger clients, were concerned that confirmation of students' housing location was too close to their arrival date, although this was one of their lesser concerns.

Finding 3: There are few differences between the offerings of Acorn and its competitors

When analyzing the accommodation of other student housing companies in London, the team found that most of the features in both the flats and buildings are similar to those available in Acorn's accommodation. The team feels there are no obvious missing amenities Acorn should look into providing.

Finding 4: Residents have mixed experiences with the maintenance process

24 out of 37 survey comments regarding maintenance were positive, with most respondents noting quick response times from maintenance staff. However, the interviews and focus group indicated dissatisfaction with the communication of the maintenance staff.

Finding 5: Acorn desires a survey to gather resident feedback efficiently

Acorn staff desired a digital survey that gathers resident satisfaction data to reduce time spent digitizing and processing results.

Finding 6: Clients could benefit from a dedicated client affairs team

Long-time clients had their own facilitator or wanted a facilitator working nearby who could attend to student concerns.

Finding 7: Residents often do not understand how to use appliances in the flat

The survey showed general dissatisfaction regarding flat appliances. This is partly due to students being unfamiliar with UK appliances.

Finding 8: Laundry facilities are the greatest cause of dissatisfaction among residents

53% of survey respondents were dissatisfied with the laundry, while only 33.4% were satisfied. Resident comments in the survey and interviews indicated an insufficient number of machines or poorly functioning machines.

Finding 9: Flats often need maintenance or have missing inventory on move-in

44.7% of survey respondents needed flat maintenance upon move-in. 58 out of 88 responses mentioned distinct items or appliances that needed repair or replacement upon arrival. This dissatisfaction is partly caused by resident unfamiliarity with British appliances.

Finding 10: Residents want a greater selection of kitchenware

Focus group attendees and 33 out of 88 survey comments showed a desire for more kitchenware. This is partly due to missing kitchen inventory upon arrival.

Finding 11: Residents want more storage space in the bedroom

29 survey comments mentioned bedroom storage space. 26 out of these 29 and the focus group attendees showed a desire for more storage space.

Finding 12: Residents are not pleased with the state of the furniture

30 residents left comments regarding furniture satisfaction in the survey. Of the 30 comments, 21 indicated dissatisfaction with the furniture. Additionally, 9 wrote that furniture was either missing or that the resident desired more furniture.

Finding 13: Wi-Fi was the second greatest cause of dissatisfaction among residents

45.3% of survey respondents were dissatisfied with the provided Wi-Fi.

Finding 14: Acorn is currently implementing solutions to many of the issues discovered

According to Acorn staff, Acorn is aware of many areas for improvement within the company. Acorn is implementing an online maintenance platform for the convenience of the company and residents, as well as a new spreadsheet for tracking storage room inventory. Kamen house is also more optimized for increased resident satisfaction compared to other buildings.

Using our findings, the team developed six recommendations to help Acorn improve resident and client satisfaction. These recommendations outline different areas of improvement for Acorn to explore in the future to increase resident satisfaction.

Recommendation 1: Introduce a digital survey to attain continual resident feedback

The team recommends that Acorn introduce a digital survey to collect feedback in place of its current paper feedback survey. We recommend Acorn use Typeform's basic free plan to create its survey. However, if Acorn chooses to upgrade to a paid option, we suggest moving to SurveyMonkey's subscription plan for better analysis tools.

Recommendation 2: Create a guide for residents based on suggestions from past residents

We recommend that Acorn creates an area guide in the form of a small trifold pamphlet highlighting different attractions and activities around London for the residents to become acquainted with the area more quickly. Ideally, these highlights would be based on past resident suggestions taken from a new question that will be added into Acorn's new feedback survey.

Recommendation 3: Improve flat turnover process

A lower cost recommendation to improve the flat turnover process is to formalize a standard training program of flat turnover. Additionally, two higher cost recommendations that would further improve this process are to increase the number of staff assigned to preparing flats for new residents or revise the move-in and move-out times.

Recommendations 4: Make modifications to the resident orientation model

To improve resident orientation, we recommend orientation not be held on the day of arrival; residents may not pay close attention because they may be jetlagged and tired. We also recommend that a member of Acorn staff check-in with residents within 48 hours of arrival to address any additional questions. Finally, we suggest that Acorn enable universities to hold a pre-orientation by providing a list of certain aspects of living the Acorn flats and London that they feel students should know beforehand.

Recommendation 5: Continue renovations and refurbishing of older buildings

For quick and low-cost solutions, we recommend Acorn add hooks into flats and risers under beds to facilitate better storage and space usage. We also recommend changing couch covers with more frequency between residents. For long term, more expensive solutions, we recommend adding more laundry facilities, replacing boilers, carpets, and couches. Older flats should assume higher priority for being renovated as finances allow.

Recommendation 6: Introduce a dedicated staff position for client affairs

We recommend the company create a new client affairs position with the responsibility of corresponding with residents and university officials during their stay in Acorn properties. Many clients and staff at Acorn feel a dedicated client affairs person would resolve many of the communication issues that are sometimes exist between clients, residents, and Acorn.

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Authorship

All members of the group reviewed and edited the entirety of the paper throughout the writing process. For an in-depth look at the primary authors of each section, the following table below is provided:

	Section	Primary Author
Introduction	1.0	Joe
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Conclusion	2.4	Joe
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Findings	4.0-4.5	All
Recommendations (intro)	5.0	-
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Recommendation 3	5.3	Julia
Recommendation 4	5.4	Sabrina
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Recommendation 6	5.6	Joe
Conclusions	6.0	Julia

The entirety of the IQP team contributed to the continual revisions of this document through the course of the entire project.

1.0 Introduction

As enrollment in higher education increases and universities strive to become more global, the number of exchange programs and exchange students steadily increases. This is especially true in Europe where the most common form of international study is “credit mobility”. Credit mobility refers to short-term programs that allow students to earn credits or work experience abroad. (Van Mol and Ekamper, 2016). According to statistics from the Erasmus+ Program, a program in the European Union supporting education, there was an increase from 22,650 to 31,727 in the number of students and trainees studying abroad in the United Kingdom between the years 2009 and 2017. This increase in exchange students, coupled with the increase in domestic students, puts a large burden on universities to provide enough housing to their students.

In densely populated, urban areas with many universities, such as London, there is much less space for universities to expand to provide housing forcing many students to find private housing off-campus. With this increase in student population in London, more and more universities are unable to provide all students with housing, and according to the University of London Housing Services, over 60% of students from 31 major colleges are forced to find private housing off-campus (“University of London Housing Services,” n.d.). The high demand for student housing creates a very strong and competitive market for private property owners and companies wishing to lease to students.

One such example of a private, student housing company is Acorn of London (Acorn), a company that has provided living arrangements for exchange students and tourists for over 40 years in over 160 flats. Acorn works primarily to provide housing to students, with international students studying abroad being its target demographic. Acorn staff have indicated that they believe Acorn is not meeting students’ wants to the best of its ability. In such a highly competitive market, it is essential that companies such as Acorn are providing the highest level of satisfaction to keep its customers happy, keep the company competitive, and retain its market share.

Acorn currently collects resident feedback; however, Acorn has indicated it feels this feedback is not sufficient or as detailed as it could be. This limited feedback creates a problem for the company as feedback from clients is one of the major ways Acorn can effectively improve the service they provide in an informed manner. Without this feedback, it becomes difficult for Acorn to improve housing and remain competitive. Two of the main factors that influence student resident satisfaction are agreed upon to be cost and location (Thomsen & Eikemo, 2010), and as Acorn is located in the academic heart of London and pricing being negotiated by the university, we feel Acorn has done well to satisfy these factors. For this reason, the amenities and conditions of the flats are the main areas Acorn could seek to improve satisfaction and as such are the focus of our study.

The goal of this project is to investigate and evaluate client residential experiences and opinions as they relate to Acorn’s housing services to develop recommendations Acorn can

implement to improve its provided services, amenities, and marketing strategies. These recommendations were developed, and our goal accomplished, through four main objectives:

1. Collect feedback from students and residents to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve client experience
2. Collect feedback from university officials to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve client experience
3. Collect and analyze information on competing companies in Acorn's market in order to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve its business
4. Create recommendations for a new feedback survey Acorn can use to make proactive changes to its housing model.

By accomplishing our goal, we will provide Acorn with means by which to increase satisfaction and remain competitive in a changing housing market.

2.0 Background

As the demand for higher education increases, so does the demand for student housing. These effects are more pronounced in large urban centers like London, due to population size and limited space. Increasing demand for student housing encourages new companies and investors to enter the market by supplying housing. For Acorn, this means more competition for its market share as these new companies will likely attract customers that Acorn could gain. This chapter will provide some context for the environment in which Acorn operates, the factors that affect student satisfaction with provided housing, and information on Acorn as a company. These details inform our understanding of the current state of housing and housing satisfaction for students, as well as what considerations must be made in providing implementable and effective recommendations for Acorn.

2.1 Market Analysis

Housing is generally an essential and durable commodity, which is appealing to investors. Currently in the UK, investors are bracing for the fallout of Brexit, which translates to investor apprehension for the broader housing market (Cable, 2019). However, the UK student housing sector remains optimistic (Yahoo! Finance, 2019, Sterling Woodrow, 2019). For the most part, this is because students remain interested in studying abroad, with the total number of students coming from outside of the UK for university or on exchange steadily increasing since 1999 (Cushman & Wakefield, 2018). The months following the announcement of Brexit saw some EU students leave the country, but the increasing amount of non-EU students' intent on entering will likely overtake this momentary loss (Cushman & Wakefield, 2018). In cities such as London, the demand for student housing has been recognized for some time, with opportunistic investors going so far as to develop housing explicitly for students, resulting in increased competition and increased focus on developing competitive properties (Taylor Wessing, 2018).

2.1.1 Types of Student Housing

Housing developed specifically for students is known as Purpose-Built Student Accommodation or PBSA. It is this kind of student housing that is most attractive to investors, with many investment groups and blogs interested almost exclusively in PBSAs. Housing in Multiple Occupation or HMOs represent the most direct alternative to PBSAs but are subject to regulations that are often not well understood, even among landlords (Ross & Tait, 2017). Additionally, the regulations are subject to constant change and input from different groups including local city councils (Ross & Tait, 2017). Another common difference between the two is simply a question of how old the facilities are. Most PBSAs were constructed recently relative to HMOs, as many HMOs are family homes or flats that were repurposed to house “strangers” (Hassan, 2019). New PBSA facilities can include gyms, studios, and other modern amenities that students value (Taylor Wessing, 2018). These are some of the challenges facing companies such as Acorn, that maintain HMOs.

2.1.2 Marketing and Competitor Analysis

Without effective marketing, no company would be able to garner enough business to remain open, let alone meet client expectations and needs. For this reason, it is essential to understand the importance of marketing, market research, and competitor analysis. Marketing and market research allow a company to more effectively sell its product or service and help build a customer base that is aware of and prefers that product over other alternatives. (Tracy, 2014; AMA, 2017).

There are several factors to consider when understanding what makes up effective marketing. Ensuring that the customer is at the center of all efforts and decision making is one such factor (Taylor 2014). If the needs and wants of the customers are not the focus, there is no guarantee the changes made to the service or product will be beneficial to the consumer. By focusing on keeping the customer satisfied, new methods of keeping the customer happy are developed and positively reinforce the company's reputation as an innovative, customer-focused organization. Focusing on the customer will lead to finding newer, better, cheaper ways of keeping them satisfied, which establishes a reason for customers to remain loyal to the company. Before maintaining customer loyalty, however, it is essential to grow the client base and gain customers. The task of gaining customers is decidedly tougher and more expensive than keeping customers. This is why many companies devote more time and attention on gaining customers rather than keeping preexisting clients (Taylor, 2014).

Another factor essential to successful marketing is an understanding of who and what business competition is. This understanding of the competition is what allows a product and business to differentiate itself over similar products on the market (Taylor, 2014; McMurtry 2017). As mentioned, the student housing market in London is very large with many companies providing student accommodation. For a company to have an advantage over others, it must understand what the competition provides. This allows it to understand and take advantage of the product's uniqueness. One example of this is Acorn's central location that many other companies do not share. By utilizing its location, Acorn is likely to get many clients that want to live closer to their schools in locations other companies cannot provide housing in.

A competitor in the market does not necessarily have to be a separate company or entity providing a similar product to you, it could also be a trend in the market or lack of knowledge about your company, product, or service (Taylor 2014). With such a large market for housing, it is essential that Acorn understands how clients learn about its service and make efforts to make its product more well-known when someone does research into student housing in London. Due to the importance of this, we will be focusing on how Acorn currently advertises itself later in this chapter and conducting research into the effectiveness of Acorn's public image.

2.2 Client Satisfaction

When booking an accommodation, whether it be a hotel, Airbnb, or other short-term housing, there are two major parts of the process that affect a client's satisfaction we will be examining in this section. If the booking process is unsatisfactory, the client may choose to book elsewhere where it is easier for them to book. If the residential experience is unsatisfactory, the

client may leave unfavorable reviews that deter new customers and not book again themselves. Both outcomes are unfavorable for the business and the following two sections will examine what aspects make up satisfaction for both aspects of renting short-term housing.

2.2.1 Booking Satisfaction

There are several different ways for a client to book a flat depending on the company. With a company such as Airbnb or other larger companies (PBSAs tend to fit into this category), the reservation process often includes browsing a list of accommodations until you find one you wish to book, at which point you put in details such as dates and number of guests and receive a breakdown of the price. An example of this is seen in the image below:

The image shows a screenshot of an Airbnb booking interface. At the top, it displays the price as £100 per night and a rating of 4.85 stars based on 213 reviews. Below this, there are input fields for 'Dates' (23-02-2020 to 24-02-2020) and 'Guests' (2 guests). A price breakdown table follows, showing the base rate of £100 for one night, a cleaning fee of £10, and a service fee of £17, resulting in a total of £127. A prominent red 'Reserve' button is located at the bottom of the breakdown, with a note stating 'You won't be charged yet' and 'Certain reservations may also require a security deposit.'

Item	Price
£100 x 1 night	£100
Cleaning fee ?	£10
Service fee ?	£17
Total	£127

Figure 1: Airbnb Price Breakdown (taken from Airbnb.co.uk)

Other companies such as Acorn will have you provide them with your contact information and the reason for your enquiry and someone working at the company will contact you with more information. An example of this contact form is below:

Figure 2: Acorn of London Contact Form (taken from acorn-london.co.uk)

These two forms of booking allow for very different experiences for the customer. The first style including an itemized price list allows the customer to see exactly how much they are paying and what exactly they are paying for. These types of booking systems, while more transparent and upfront, tend to be more impractical for smaller companies as they tend to be expensive to implement, manage, and maintain (Wang, Li, Li, & Zhang, 2014). This often leads to smaller companies continuing to use systems relying on direct contact with a salesperson or other employee of the company, such as the contact form seen above. As mentioned, Acorn uses this method which allows them to establish a more personal rapport with possible clients, discussing said client's needs and budget with the intent to provide them with the accommodation that best fits. This method of booking also allows Acorn to be more flexible in its booking and better meet the needs of potential clients.

Both methods have their benefits but regardless of the method used, it is essential the client interfacing with the system has an easy, problem-free experience as this is one of the first direct experiences the client has with the company and could create initial impressions that influence their satisfaction for the entirety of the trip.

2.2.2 Residential Satisfaction

Meeting the preferences and needs of university students is essential to providing a satisfactory residential experience. It is important to know what students typically search for in housing and what aspects they value when they choose where they would like to rent. It is common for students to encounter five major issues while seeking accommodation: high rent, low quality of housing, doubtful contracts, low housing supply, and unfavorable locations (Thomsen & Eikemo, 2010). There are a multitude of factors that contribute to whether a student is likely to deem an accommodation to be satisfactory, ranging from unavoidable aspects, such as the rent cost or location, to smaller, more specific reasons like what services or amenities are provided (Thomsen & Eikemo, 2010). Furthermore, the factors which determine what housing is

satisfactory are continuously changing due to different generations of students having different preferences as they reach university age (La Roche, Reeves, Flanigan, & Copeland 2010). Given this wide range of elements that impact student housing satisfaction, it is important for housing providers to focus on the primary aspects that are frequently sought out and most significantly affect satisfaction.

Among the various concerns that plague university students seeking accommodation, two main issues are the most predominant. These are the cost of rent and the location of the housing. As many university students must work to pay rent, the cost of rent is a major limiting factor during the search for housing. With HMOs, monthly rent costs range greatly from £1,333 to £10,000 for a four to five-bedroom flat, and almost half of the student population, at least 45%, work a part-time job for money to pay rent (Bromley 2019, Gil 2014). One in four students identified cost as an aspect that had a large impact or was a deal-breaker for renting an accommodation (La Roche et al., 2010). It was also found that there is some disparity between the genders regarding the importance of cost as males demonstrated that a low rent was most important to them; however, females expressed there were other aspects of housing that held priority (Nijënstein, Haans, Kemperman, & Borgers, 2015). As far as the location of an accommodation, students have different perspectives when evaluating the location of a flat, such as the neighborhood the house is in or its proximity to locations of interests such as certain businesses or entertainment venues (Nijënstein et al., 2015). The location of a flat regarding the neighborhood and surrounding area can negatively influence a student's perspective if the resident does not consider the area ideal. For example, students prefer not to live in neighborhoods or other areas they deem unsafe (Magni, Pescaroli, & Bartolucci, 2019). A different perspective that students consider while evaluating housing is the proximity to certain points of interest. Students often prefer to be within close to their campus when living in off-campus housing, listing that they would prefer to stay within walking distance of the university (La Roche et al., 2010). Aside from being close to campus, students have also expressed interest in living close to places of entertainment. In many urban universities, it is common for students to want to live closer to the center of the city because it can provide a source of recreation and leisure (Nijënstein et al., 2015). This desire to live close to the city and other points of interest has a different effect on students in large urban areas like London that have a large transit infrastructure. Students want to live close to bus stations and tube stops they use frequently and desire to live in locations that do not cause them to have a longer commute than necessary (such as crowded trains or switching buses and trains many times). There is also a correlation between these two major points of housing consideration (rent cost and location) with each aspect enhancing the impact that the other has on satisfaction (Thomsen & Eikemo, 2010). Although location and rent are two aspects that are most contemplated while evaluating housing, many other factors contribute to student housing satisfaction, which are discussed further in this section.

As different generations pursue higher education, new student housing trends continue to arise, especially from younger students with more modern preferences. In more recent years,

students are expecting more from student accommodations and are beginning to distance themselves from the traditional ideas of student housing. The main difference seen here is that students seek a more private and luxurious housing experience. In an attempt to keep up with these new trends and maintain student satisfaction, universities and private accommodation providers have started to offer different types of housing and more amenities. One of the popular new trends is the desire for a more private living space (Strzalka 2019). In contrast to the traditional model of student housing which typically makes use of shared bedrooms and shared bathrooms, students now wish for more privacy and comfort (Balogh, 2009). Researchers attribute this shift in attitude to the younger generations having higher expectations for housing (La Roche et al., 2010). While single rooms on-campus are rare, they do still exist, and students express their willingness to pay extra for this more private living option. Since single student accommodations are not common among university-provided housing, and students' preferences in types of housing are changing, many students have taken their search for housing to private housing providers. As the student population continues to increase, private housing providers are getting involved, marketing "high standard single person flats" (Verhetsel, Kessels, Zijlstra, & Van Bavel, 2016). These privately-owned accommodations can provide a more satisfactory living experience for students as they are more likely to offer single person flats with a private bedroom and bathroom. These types of flats offering a more private living quarters are often classified as PBSAs as many HMOs tend to be older buildings that cannot support many of the new requests and wants from students.

In addition to a more private living space, students are also interested in housing opportunities that offer more amenities and luxuries. Students now expect amenities that were previously considered to be luxuries and add-ons for a higher cost. Similar to students' willingness to pay more for private housings, students share that same willingness to spend extra for these amenities. One amenity that greatly impacts student satisfaction is a kitchen within the student's accommodation. The ability to cook meals within the housing has been listed as a main positive aspect of a student housing situation (Muslim, Karim, & Abdullah, 2012). Another major expectation of student housing now is the access to a stable, fast Wi-Fi connection, which is an essential component of a student's academic and leisure aspects of life (La Roche et al., 2010). In addition to these larger, more highly demanded amenities, there are also a multitude of other add-ons that are now expected such as on-site laundry facilities, temperature control for each room and flat, as well as exercise and fitness facilities (Moore, Carswell, Worthy, & Nielsen, 2019). Given the many changes in housing trends that universities and private housing providers have encountered in the past years, it is in a company's best interest to keep track of continuously increasing student expectations to ensure student housing owners maintain their student residents' satisfaction levels. If Acorn can adjust its provided housing according to the major needs and wants of students while minimally increasing the rent cost, the student is more likely to recommend the flat provider, and this allows the company to perform better and expand its offerings.

2.3 Acorn of London

Based out of Bloomsbury, a district in the West End of London, Acorn of London is a company that offers serviced and furnished flats throughout central London and has been doing so for over 40 years. The location of Acorn's buildings can be seen in the following map and consists of properties in two areas, Farringdon and Bloomsbury.

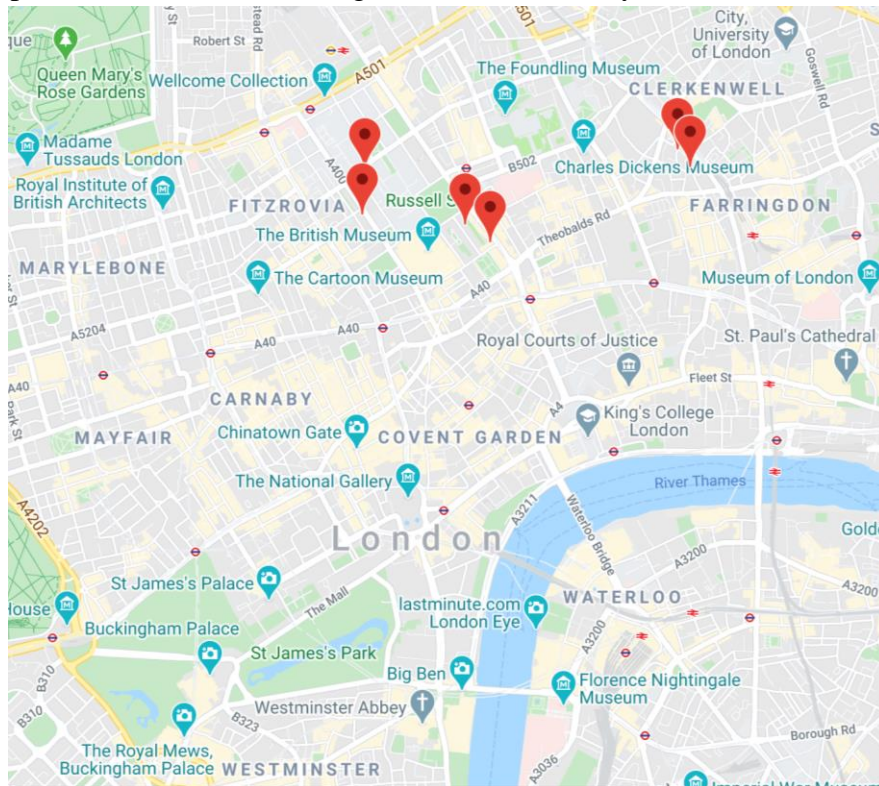


Figure 3: Map of Acorn's Properties

The properties located in Bloomsbury are Bedford Place, Bloomsbury Place, Byng Place, and Gower Street, and the properties in Farringdon are Baker's Row, Crawford Passage, and Kamen House. Acorn provides flats in trendy locations that allow its residents to get the whole experience of living in London. Acorn states they “have a passion for the spectacular city of London and love to help [its] guests discover the fun and beauty of this busy cosmopolitan city” (Acorn of London, n.d.). Acorn proudly describes its housing accommodation as competitively priced flats without the sacrifice of location and size (Acorn of London, n.d.). While Acorn rents to a variety of different people, when possible, Acorn directly targets renting towards American university students. In most cases, student renters stay longer durations within Acorn's housing than a standard tourist on vacation would due to the nature of study abroad programs. By targeting universities, Acorn can create long-standing contracts that keep its accommodations full for longer portions of the year.

2.3.1 Acorn's Advertising

As mentioned before, marketing is an essential aspect of growing and maintaining a business and client base. This section will examine how Acorn currently markets and advertises

itself in order to gain new customers and fulfill the needs of a potential demographic. Word of mouth is the primary method Acorn uses to promote its housing (Hassan, 2019). While there are instances where this form of publicity is helpful, word of mouth often does not reach people quickly or on a large scale. Other avenues Acorn has used to promote its business include attending education conferences, such as the annual NAFSA conference. NAFSA, the Association of International Educators, "...is the world's largest nonprofit association dedicated to international education and exchange. NAFSA's 10,000 members are located at more than 3,500 institutions worldwide, in over 150 countries" (NAFSA, 2019). Attending these types of conferences targets university representatives that might be looking for housing companies to find housing for groups of future students studying abroad. Conferences are beneficial when trying to reach out to universities, though they may not work well to attract students trying to locate housing completely on their own. Lastly, Acorn promotes its business via the Acorn website. Due to the highly accessible nature of the internet, it is important for businesses to have reliable online identities. Potential residents from areas outside of London would most likely not be able to independently find information about Acorn without first accessing the Acorn website or through other agents and booking sites that Acorn works with.

2.3.2 Accommodations/Services

Acorn offers flats in two main areas as mentioned: Bloomsbury and Farringdon (also referred to as Clerkenwell). These flats are all located in the public transit Zone 1. The style and size of flats range from small studio flats for one, to flats that can house over ten residents. Acorn offers fully furnished flats which include fully equipped kitchens, access to laundry facilities, televisions, and Wi-Fi. The picture below is a Farringdon flat in Crawford Passage:



Figure 4: Inside of a Crawford Passage Flat

Additionally, Acorn supplies towels and linens for bedding. If residents stay longer than eight days, an Acorn provides a cleaning service that changes bed linens and towels weekly. Acorn has an in-house maintenance team that can be contacted when needed. To submit a maintenance request, Acorn has an online submission form on its website that the resident can fill out to voice any concerns or desires regarding maintenance. This service submission section also allows the user to submit any information regarding cleaning and IT help as well. Any enquiries desired to be conducted in person can be handled from 9am-5:30pm Monday-Friday at the Acorn main office (Acorn of London, n.d.). Acorn has indicated it does not have a widescale method to effectively receive feedback from its residents, whether it be praise or discontentment regarding current resident experiences, due to currently using a paper survey that is distributed by facilities staff. For a housing company to increase the satisfaction of its residents, it must first know and understand the opinions and desires of said residents.

2.4 Summary

The student housing market in London is growing and is highly profitable due to the large and increasing number of students studying in London. These students need housing that universities are not typically able to provide, causing students to look for off-campus housing, provided by private companies such as Acorn. This creates a competitive market for these companies to operate in, and as such, Acorn must ensure it is providing the best possible experience it can. The main factors affecting a student's housing decisions are typically the cost of rent, the location of the flat in proximity to other businesses and entertainment, and subfactors such as amenities and services provided. (Thomsen & Eikemo, 2010)

Understanding the factors that generally create the most satisfaction for students in housing, as well as understanding how Acorn currently operates, allows us to achieve our goals of helping Acorn improve student satisfaction in its housing, help Acorn better understand its market, and formulate a more effective method Acorn can use to gather its own housing feedback. By achieving our goal of increasing Acorn's student satisfaction, along with our secondary goal of improving Acorn's marketing, we will be able to help Acorn better operate and house students with higher satisfaction rates.

3.0 Methodology and Implementation

The goal of this project was to investigate and evaluate client and residential experiences and opinions as they relate to Acorn's housing services to develop recommendations Acorn could implement to improve its provided services, amenities, and marketing strategies. This goal was accomplished through four objectives:

1. Collect feedback from students and residents to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve client experience
2. Collect feedback from university officials to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve client experience
3. Collect and analyze information on competing companies in Acorn's market in order to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve its business
4. Create recommendations for a new feedback survey Acorn can use to make proactive changes to its housing model.

In this chapter, we detail the methods that were used to compile feedback regarding opinions on Acorn's housing, as well as the effect of marketing and advertising influences that were current at the time. The project took place in 2020 from mid-January through the beginning of March. We worked with students staying in Acorn's housing during that timeframe and during the semester prior to it. Additionally, we worked with the universities which sent students to live at Acorn in order to understand university opinions as well. This feedback allowed us to complete our goals of both forming recommendations to help Acorn improve its housing and market presence, as well as highlighting changes Acorn could make to its satisfaction survey to obtain better data.

3.1 Bias

Our team strove to gather data and help Acorn improve for the future. Yet, it is important to acknowledge the fact that every member of the team stayed in Acorn's Crawford flats during the project. Because of this, we possessed a viewpoint that might have been skewed at times. Our stay allowed us to better understand some resident feedback since we shared their experiences, but it also might have elevated the weight of certain issues in our minds due to their role in our collective experiences. Additionally, most of the clients we interviewed were introduced to us by Acorn's sales team, hence there was an increased likelihood that their relationship with Acorn and the sales team overall was positive. The team took steps to mitigate the drawbacks of these sources of bias, nonetheless, we do not claim our results are devoid of their influence.

3.2 Collect feedback from students and residents to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve client experience

In order to create recommendations Acorn could use to improve its client experience, we needed to establish a complete picture of the Acorn housing experience, focusing on what parts of it affected the opinions of students staying in the flats, both positively or negatively. To build this overview, we surveyed students staying in Acorn's housing and held a focus group with a small group of students to gather opinions and feedback. Using surveys allowed us to reach

many residents easily and our focus group allowed us to get a better insight into the responses provided in the survey as well as brainstorm recommendations.

3.2.1 Surveying Acorn's Student Population

The main purpose of the survey was to build a broad overview of what factors cause satisfaction and dissatisfaction in Acorn's housing. As can be seen in Appendix A, the survey's primary focus was to identify the parts of the housing and the move-in process that have the greatest effect on satisfaction (e.g., kitchen amenities) by asking students to rate these aspects and give an optional brief explanation of these ratings. The survey gave a general overview of these factors and was used to influence the questions asked in the focus group (as discussed in the next section). By collecting and summarizing this information, we were able to provide Acorn with an overview of what factors affect resident satisfaction the most in Acorn's provided housing.

The team selected surveys to gather this information because we desired the ability to reach as many students who have stayed in Acorn's housing in the past year as we could. A survey can easily reach a large population and requires minimal effort from the respondents. The questions asked were simple and short enough to be effectively administered through a survey. We elected to make our survey sample consist of only students living in the housing within the past school year (Fall '19 semester and Spring '20 semester), as we wanted the data to be current and Acorn is continually working to improve the resident experience.

Student residents completed the survey digitally through the Qualtrics survey platform and were asked to take the survey using a flyer designed by the team (as seen below).



Figure 5: Survey Distribution Flyer

Acorn housekeeping staff dropped these flyers off in Acorn flats; however, our team also knocked on the doors of flats in five of Acorn's properties to personally distribute the survey and ask residents to take part. These properties were Bedford Place, Bloomsbury Place, Byng Place, Crawford Passage, and Bakers Row. By knocking on doors, we were able to speak face to face with the students to explain the study which helped convince students to take the survey once they understood the benefits. In some cases, we also met professors and faculty with students staying in Acorn housing who were willing to email or otherwise distribute the survey to their students staying in Acorn accommodation.

In order to encourage students to take the survey, Acorn sponsored a random prize drawing of £20 that could be elevated to £50 if the student connected and interacted with Acorn on Instagram. Acorn proposed structuring the incentive this way as a method for the company to promote more communication and engagement with its clients using social media. After collecting all the survey responses, the results were analyzed to determine what trends existed across all Acorn properties as well as differences in trends between buildings.

3.2.2 Student Focus Group

Our focus group consisted of student residents in Acorn housing and was primarily focused on what improvements the students believed could be made to the flats and why the residents gave the ratings they did in the survey. The focus group guide in Appendix B shows the questions asked followed the same layout of topics from the survey and asked for students' opinions on the flats and recommendations for improvements for the flats. This information, and the information from the survey, created an overview of how residents felt about the housing and what factors impacted satisfaction the most. We decided to hold a focus group rather than interviews for this part of the data collection because we felt the inter-student interaction would create discussions and conversations that would not otherwise happen in a one on one interview situation. Additionally, allowing the students to collectively brainstorm ideas for recommendations on improvements to the flats resulted in better results than we likely would have gotten from individual students.

As mentioned previously, while distributing the surveys to our sample of students, we inquired for volunteers and asked that anyone interested in the group supply us with their email address so we may have contacted them. Two weeks after the initial survey distribution, twenty students who voluntarily elected to provide us with their contact information were contacted asking to attend a focus group. Once again, Acorn provided our team with an incentive for a prize drawing to encourage students to attend: a two-night stay in Acorn accommodation for up to five people between February and November 2020. The focus group consisted of three students, and these students were asked questions general, guiding questions to start conversations on different aspects of the housing. The team took notes on the students' individual responses and comments, being careful to note when students agreed or disagreed with different students' opinions and comments. One example question for the focus group was: "If you could change one thing about your housing, what would you change?" This allowed students to propose their own changes that could factor into possible recommendations made for

Acorn to improve and some of these recommendations from students influenced our team's final recommendations.

3.3 Collect feedback from university officials to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve client experience

Given that the student housing market is highly competitive, it was important to determine what made Acorn's housing more appealing to potential clients. Since the main clients of Acorn are American universities that send large groups of students to study abroad in London, we interviewed university officials responsible for choosing the accommodations for their students.

We determined that posing questions in the form of an interview, rather than a survey, would grant us the best results as we wanted to receive more in-depth answers for a greater understanding of the housing selection process from a business perspective. To gather data, we conducted interviews that lasted approximately thirty minutes with officials from five different American universities, two clients related to university bookings, and one individual student who booked independently. To gain better insight into this process and determine why clients choose Acorn, we focused our interview questions, seen in Appendix C, on the client's priorities, student and faculty feedback trends, and booking experiences regarding choosing student accommodation.

The team organized interviews through email after Acorn put us in contact with individuals and university officials who were eager and willing to speak with us about their housing selection experiences. Many interviews took place through Skype calls if both parties could not meet in person. Two team members usually conducted video and in-person interviews. As one teammate asked the questions, taking the role of the lead interviewer, the other focused on taking detailed notes on the client's responses. While most interviews were conducted in person, there were some who opted to communicate with us through Skype, WhatsApp, and email. In these cases, where the client preferred not to directly have a chat with us, the team sent an email with a copy of our interview questions asking them to please fill out the answers in a reply email. After each interview, the notes taken were reviewed and reformatted. These final notes were then analyzed to identify common trends among question responses across the different interviews.

3.4 Collect and analyze information on competing companies in Acorn's market in order to determine what changes Acorn can make to improve its business

We decided to investigate several competing housing companies within the London area and determine what Acorn's competitors had to offer their clients. By analyzing the competition, we were able to compare the different aspects of housing in which Acorn and its competitors extend to their clients. To gather this information, the team deemed a content analysis of competitor websites to be the most efficient way to collect our desired data.

Since the housing market in London is extensive, the team decided to narrow our search to only companies specifically identified as either a PBSA or an HMO. While gathering the competitor data, we inputted our findings into an Excel spreadsheet designed to neatly layout the

information we discovered. The Excel spreadsheet was formatted so that every competitor would have an entry for each type of room (e.g., studio, twin) that was offered in each building. PBSA style housing and HMO style housing were separated into two different sheets within the same Excel file. When browsing through the competitors' different housing options the team visited the webpages of each companies' different buildings and took note of building locations, types of rooms offered, average price range per week, amenities offered, building features, flat/individual room features, and other housing aspects. In our research, the team first focused our efforts towards exploring the many PBSAs of London and then moved on to researching other HMOs. In addition to searching for competitors' main features, the team also looked at whether competitors had existing partnerships with specific universities, and this information was entered into the spreadsheet if applicable. Once all the available competitor information was gathered, the data was analyzed to identify frequently offered amenities and services, typical housing prices, and other features that were commonly provided by competitors. The team then used the trends found in this analysis to aid in developing recommendations to help Acorn improve its business and delivered the completed spreadsheet to Acorn staff as a compiled collection of data on several competing companies.

3.5 Create recommendations for a new feedback survey Acorn can use to make proactive changes to its housing model.

After collecting the results from the survey, interviews, and focus groups, the team constructed recommendations for a new survey for Acorn. Any specific topics or concerns that residents frequently brought up in our team's survey or focus group were taken into consideration when creating the recommendations so that the survey improvements facilitated more useful, targeted feedback. When determining what questions to recommend, it was important to ensure all respondents would interpret questions the same, as to avoid any errors when collecting and analyzing results. By having created and implemented our own survey for a short period of time, we were able to see if respondents had trouble answering certain questions in order to determine if there were types of questions Acorn should avoid on its revised survey.

The team then analyzed previous results from the survey Acorn used in the past semester with the goal of determining what areas of the survey needed improvement. Acorn distributed paper surveys to residents towards the end of their stays and these surveys consisted of a half-page of paper with questions spanning the down front and back. The full transcribed survey can be seen in Appendix E. Since residents filled out the surveys on paper, all the survey responses needed to be digitized by hand, a task that could become unnecessarily time-consuming if carried out consistently. In total, 87 survey responses were supplied to us by Acorn from the Fall 2019 semester. Looking at Acorn's survey, there were nine main question groups with a select few containing smaller sub-questions. Most questions asked the respondent to check boxes to rate housing aspects, with few optional questions asking for written responses. The overall survey was short in length which could be beneficial, but not all questions covered important aspects of the housing experience and some focused too much on subjects that did not affect the resident in a major way. For example, having multiple questions about the client's experience with the

receptionists was not the best use of space when most residents typically only interact with the receptionist for a few short moments. Questions that related directly to topics that residents dealt with on a more daily basis should have taken precedence on a survey regarding satisfaction. However, the use of many multiple-choice questions within the survey did help make the survey easier to complete and made it more likely for students to complete the survey.

We decided that Acorn would best benefit from a digital survey rather than a physical survey. In terms of cost and effectiveness, implementing a digital survey would be the method to follow (Greenlaw, 2009). Our suggested questions for a new survey for Acorn can be found in Appendix F. We chose to organize the survey primarily by asking respondents to rank specific topics about their stay on a 5-point scale ranging from highly satisfied to highly dissatisfied. In order to gain more insight but not deter residents from partaking in the survey, an optional comment option was added below the rankings to allow respondents to explain why they selected certain rankings. This optional comment would allow Acorn to better understand how they can continually stay on top of positive resident satisfaction and understand why residents gave the ratings they did. We analyzed three different survey platforms to determine which would best suit Acorn's needs. The three platforms consisted of SurveyMonkey, Typeform, and Google Forms. The cost of subscriptions and overall functionality were considered when looking at survey platforms.

4.0 Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, we present our major findings grouped into four categories: the booking experience, Acorn-client communication, appliance satisfaction and misunderstanding with appliances, and possible areas of improvement for the flats. These findings are informed by 88 survey responses from students living in 5 of Acorn's properties, 8 interviews with clients including university and study abroad program officials, interviews with Acorn staff, and a focus group of student residents.

4.1 Booking Experience

In addition to the satisfaction of students living in Acorn's properties, we also examined the satisfaction of those who book the accommodation for themselves or on behalf of a group of students. These findings detail the major discoveries regarding how residents feel about the booking process through Acorn.

4.1.1 Finding 1: The primary factors that make Acorn excel as a housing company are location and the option of short stay

While conducting interviews, clients expressed similar aspects they prioritize in their search for student accommodations. The most common priority voiced by 6 of 8 interviewees was the importance of location, as our interview results indicated that clients were seeking housing close to students' classes, internships, or other work. One of Acorn's primary selling points is its prime location within transit Zone 1 of London, and this aspect of Acorn's housing is one of the main sources of client satisfaction. According to the student survey results, 95.2% of students were either satisfied or highly satisfied with the location of their flat.

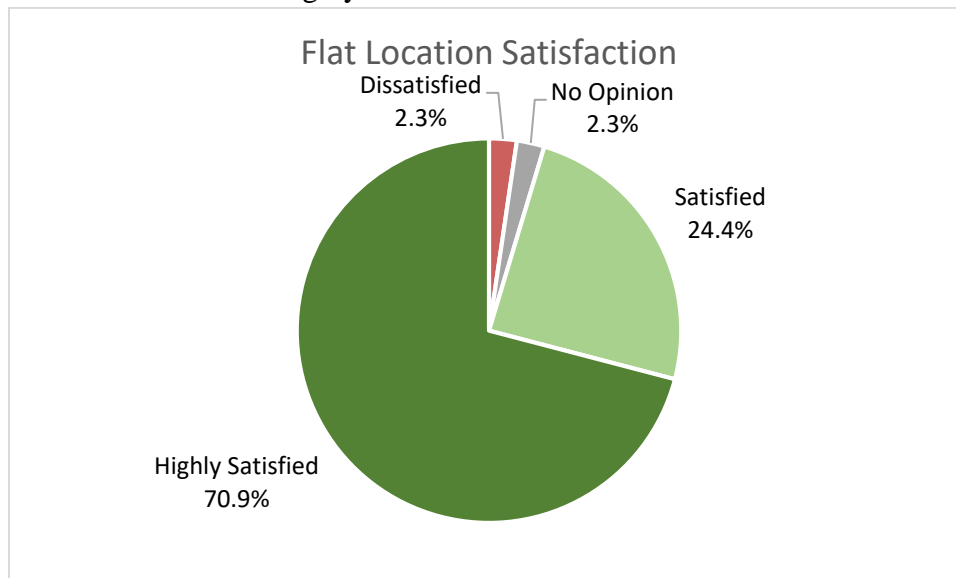


Figure 6: Flat Location Satisfaction of Acorn Residents

Another deciding factor that 3 of 8 clients mentioned, was their need for a housing provider that had flexible booking dates. Our research into competing housing providers showed that most housing companies have a minimum stay length, especially PBSAs. These companies only want to take clients who will be booking for full calendar years, many universities do not

run programs that last this long. All interviewees were booking student accommodation for study abroad programs, with each of the programs lasting less than a 20-week period, which is shorter than the typical minimum stay period of many companies. Since many other housing providers seek only year-long clients and Acorn accommodates clients who require a short stay, Acorn serves as a good option for American universities running study abroad programs in London.

4.1.2 Finding 2: Housing location confirmation is concerning to clients

When asking clients about the booking process and their experiences booking with Acorn, the response was that the process was generally easy and went smoothly. Typically, clients would speak with the sales team well in advance to give a general time and duration of their stay, and then later in the process the clients would make official bookings with the company for concrete dates. One detail often not confirmed was the exact flats residents would be housed in. It was a common concern among 5 out of 8 of our interviewees that the time in which they would receive confirmation of their students’ housing location was closer to their arrival date than the clients would have liked. Most expressed that they would prefer to have had this detail settled earlier in the process, but clients are understanding of this issue because student numbers fluctuate, and Acorn books many universities for the same time period. Due to this, Acorn may have to rearrange which flats and buildings each university can use causing late notification of exact flats.

4.1.3 Finding 3: There are few differences between the offerings of Acorn and its competitors

Using the data collected on other housing companies in London, the team determined that there are not many major differences in the offerings between Acorn and the companies we examined. As mentioned in section 3.4, the data collection process primarily consisted of taking information from the different companies’ websites, with companies including iQ, Axo, Urbanest, Anglo Education Services, and LHA London. This information was then entered into a spreadsheet with an example of two entries below. The full spreadsheet, including 88 HMO properties and 95 PBSA properties, is available as a separate supporting document to this report due to the large format of the data and table.

Location	Company	Type of Room	Housing Type	Cost/Week/Person	Min. Stay
Paris Gardens	iQ	Three Bed	PBSA	£309	34 Weeks
New Cross	Axo	Studio	PBSA	£260	43 Weeks

Table 1: Competitor Analysis Spreadsheet Excerpt

This table includes some of the different categories we searched for. Other categories in the table, not shown above, include the number of students in the flat, the building features, the flat/individual room features, bed size, and whether bills are included or not. When looking at both the building and flat features, the team found most of the major features shared across most companies, such as in-house laundry facilities, building security systems like CCTV, and well-equipped kitchens, were also present in Acorn’s accommodation. Some companies did provide other luxuries such as in-house gyms or other entertainment features like cinema rooms,

however, all the companies with similar models to Acorn did not provide these extra luxuries. For this reason, the team concluded that there were no major differences between Acorn and the competitors we examined.

4.2 Communication

The next three findings involve communication with Acorn. These findings include communication between general clients but mainly focus on resident experience. Communication with clients and residents shape Acorn's reputation, with many clients showing willingness to forgive minor mistakes or inconveniences when communicated with properly.

4.2.1 Finding 4: Residents desire better communication with maintenance staff

Based on our data, 24 out of 37 survey comments regarding experiences with maintenance spoke about maintenance in a positive manner, and a majority of interviewees noted the quick response time to maintenance requests. However, it became apparent during interviews and the focus group that residents had some dissatisfaction with the communication of the maintenance team. Many residents voiced that maintenance staff would enter properties without proper warning or would just knock and enter rooms, giving the resident no time to prepare or answer the door themselves. Residents often did not know on which day or what time to expect maintenance staff. Additionally, if maintenance was not able to properly fix the problem immediately, residents did not know when maintenance planned to return or how long they would be left with a broken appliance or flat issue.

4.2.2 Finding 5: Acorn voiced interest in a survey to gather resident feedback efficiently

Without up-to-date feedback, it is difficult for Acorn to stay ahead of the curve when identifying trends in residents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with its provided services and accommodations. Acorn in the past has distributed its own surveys to collect resident satisfaction feedback, but the survey distribution method was not optimal, and the numbers of responses were not as high as desired. Acorn distributed paper surveys at the end of residents' stay and collected any completed surveys. However, digitizing data from paper surveys is an avoidable time-consuming process and can often lead to transcription errors. Acorn staff indicated their interest in a revised survey that gathers relevant resident housing satisfaction data in a faster and more efficient manner.

There are several options when it comes to gathering survey data online for relatively low cost. We found that having access to online surveys greatly sped up the process of collecting and interpreting the data to find trends. Unfortunately, the tool we used is only available to Acorn for a steep cost, so we instead presented them with a few alternatives that cost up to £28 per month. These options were Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, and Typeform. For the sake of saving money, each tool has a free option if Acorn wants to try it out before committing to a monthly fee. All three are easy to use, but Google Forms is slightly less polished than SurveyMonkey, which is in turn, less polished than Typeform. However, SurveyMonkey is more well-known which speaks to its reliability. Typeform and Google Forms can send data directly to Google Sheets and Google Sheets can export to most common data file formats, including .xlsx for Excel (which Acorn uses in other departments). SurveyMonkey requires the first tier of paid features to

allow for this kind of integration. If Acorn prefers Google Sheets, then sending it to Excel is an unnecessary step. Below is a table showing several of the most notable features included in each plan:

	Google Forms (Free)	Typeform (Free)	SurveyMonkey (Free)	Typeform (£28/month)	SurveyMonkey (£25/month)
Number of Survey Questions	Unlimited	10	10	Unlimited	Unlimited
Number of Surveys	Unlimited	3	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited
Number of Survey Responses	Unlimited	100 per month	100 per survey	1000 per month	Unlimited
Online Analysis Tools	Some Tools	Minimal Tools	Some Tools	Some Tools	Advanced Tools
Integration Capacity	Google Sheets, CSV	Google Sheets, CSV	None	Google Sheets, CSV, other	CSV, XLS, PDF, other
Aesthetic Customization	Medium	Low	Low	High	High

Table 2: Survey Distribution Platform Comparison

4.2.3 Finding 6: Clients could benefit from a dedicated client affairs team

Most of Acorn’s clients are groups of students from universities in the United States. After several interviews, it became clear that it was common for long-time clients to desire a facilitator working nearby when students moved in to help their students feel attended to. These individuals helped the students field requests and follow up on communication with Acorn, making sure that students had a person to rely on if communication with Acorn slipped. Our data showed interest in a dedicated client affairs team that could help these facilitators, or even assume some of the facilitator’s duties for large groups, to improve client satisfaction with communication between clients, residents, and Acorn.

4.3 Appliance Satisfaction and Misunderstandings

As mentioned, Acorn’s primary demographic is students from America. This cultural difference often leads to confusion when appliances such as washer/dryers or sockets are different than what the resident is accustomed to. The following two findings outline resident satisfaction in appliances and details how a lack of understanding may affect this satisfaction.

4.3.1 Finding 7: Residents often do not understand how to use appliances in the flat

While analyzing the student comments from our survey we found a general trend of dissatisfaction regarding appliances provided in the flat, however, this may be attributed to the students’ lack of understanding in how to properly use them. Appliances in different countries can vary widely in terms of proper usage. With UK appliances in the flats such as the electric shower or the stove exhaust, international students have no direction as to how to properly operate the foreign appliances. For example, students who are not familiar with the electrical

sockets do not initially know that they must be switched on. Similarly, students did not know how to use the stove exhaust vent and in some cases, they were not even aware that the kitchen was equipped with one. The two appliances that students had the most issues with were the shower and the oven. Many students who faced problems with the shower had issues with controlling temperature and water pressure. Difficulties with the ovens were attributed to students' unfamiliarity with the Celsius temperature system as well as the symbols for different oven settings. Some students were provided with an instruction manual; however, some manuals were discovered to be for a different model of oven and as such were not helpful.

4.3.2 Finding 8: Laundry facilities are the greatest cause of dissatisfaction for residents

Based on the data from the surveys distributed to residents, laundry was the most common source of dissatisfaction for residents. 53% of respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied with the laundry while only 33.4% were satisfied or highly satisfied. While some laundry dissatisfaction could be attributed to the misuse of machines, some residents also indicated issues with the machines that go beyond a misunderstanding of the machines. Residents explained in the survey and interviews that there was an insufficient number of machines in communal laundry rooms and machines took too long to wash or dry. Residents in Bedford were evenly split in terms of satisfaction, whereas Byng residents were overwhelmingly dissatisfied. While the data is not clear now as to why there would be a split, one probable answer is that most Byng residents must climb up and down several flights of stairs to access the laundry machines, only to be met with all machines in use.

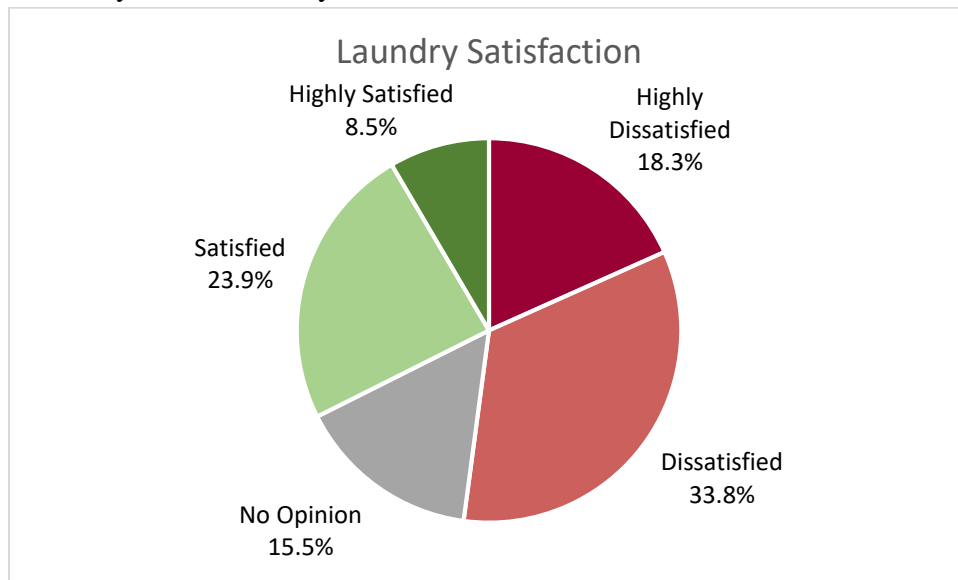


Figure 7: Laundry Satisfaction of Acorn Residents

4.4 Flat Improvements

In addition to student unfamiliarity with appliances, we also took note of other aspects of the flat that affect students' opinions. These were parts of the flat which we felt could be changed to improve resident satisfaction. The following five findings indicate different areas of the Acorn flats that could be improved based on resident feedback.

4.4.1 Finding 9: Flats often need maintenance or have missing inventory on move-in

While overall the maintenance team is quick to respond to residents and regarded as helpful, many residents needed to contact maintenance on arrival to fix appliances or notify Acorn that standard flat items were missing. When asked if residents needed to contact maintenance upon arrival, 44.7% of residents responded yes. Out of the 88 survey responses, residents listed a total of 58 distinct items or appliances that needed repair or replacement upon arrival. 13 respondents noted that on move-in their shower needed maintenance, making the shower the most common appliance needing immediate repair. Reported issues with the shower included inconsistent hot water or no hot water at all, as well as varying water pressure. Other common examples of items that needed maintenance upon arrival included the oven, the stovetop, the Wi-Fi network, and the toaster. Residents also indicated unhappiness with the prevalence of incomplete flat inventory upon move-in. The largest amount of missing inventory was reported in the kitchen. Of the 71 comments left regarding the kitchen, 33 responses indicated that specific kitchen utensils or equipment were missing from the flat on arrival. Common missing equipment included frying pans, pots, pot lids, cheese graters, cutlery, and other standard kitchenware. In an extreme case, surveys indicated that at least one flat was initially without a kitchen table and chairs. First impressions are important as they shape the experience as a whole and having missing kitchenware and other inventory issues harm these initial impressions.

4.4.2 Finding 10: Residents desire a greater selection of kitchenware

A reoccurring opinion that arose while gathering feedback about the kitchen was the desire for more kitchenware.

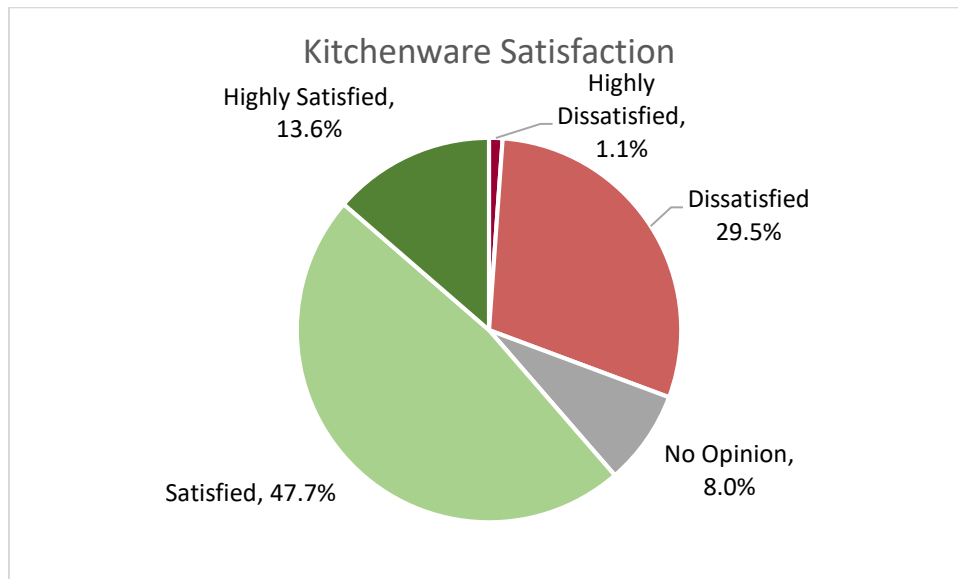


Figure 8: Kitchenware Satisfaction of Acorn Residents

Overall, 30.7% of the residents claimed they were dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied with the provided kitchenware. While that percentage is not a majority, comments regarding the kitchen in the survey and focus group revealed in greater detail that residents felt they did not have

enough kitchenware or utensils. It is important to note that residents are unaware of what inventory is standard to a flat, and it cannot easily be inferred if the desire for a greater selection of kitchenware stemmed from flats not having proper inventory. Despite this, during the focus group, attendees were asked what kitchenware they had and if they wanted more, and even when flats did have the correct inventory, the attendees still would have liked more items such as extra plates, bowls, and cups per resident.

4.4.3 Finding 11: Residents showed interest in more storage space in the bedroom

When information was collected on satisfaction regarding the bedroom, residents were generally satisfied with the overall bedroom, as can be seen by the following charts.

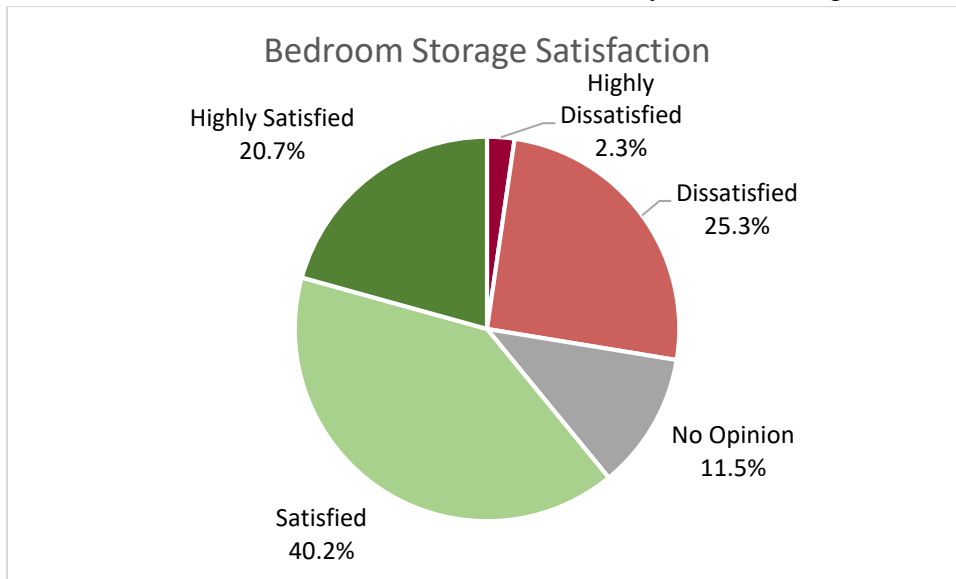


Figure 9: Bedroom Storage Satisfaction of Acorn Residents

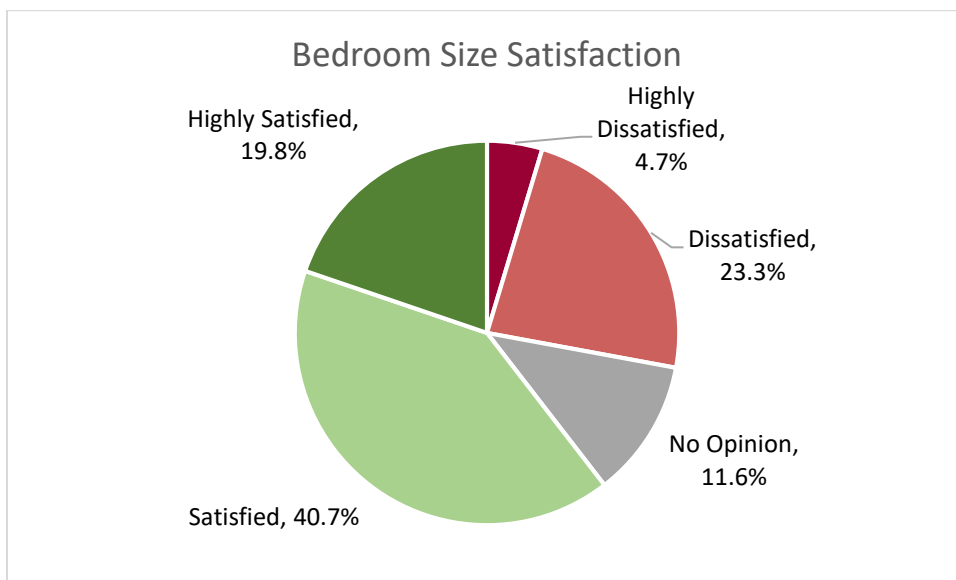


Figure 10: Bedroom Size Satisfaction of Acorn Residents

Asking about bedroom size revealed only 28.0% of residents felt they were dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied. Additionally, residents were only 27.6% dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied with bedroom storage. However, during interviews and the analysis of survey comments, we found residents desired more storage space within the bedrooms. In the survey, 29 comments were left that mentioned bedroom storage space. 26 out of these 29 wrote that they desired more storage space. This desire for more storage space was also presented by the attendees of our focus group. Residents of Byng Place explained that they could not fit their suitcases under their beds and ended up using extra desk space to store clothing.

4.4.4 Finding 12: Residents are not pleased with the state of the furniture

According to the survey results, 61.6% of respondents were either satisfied or highly satisfied when asked about the provided furniture.

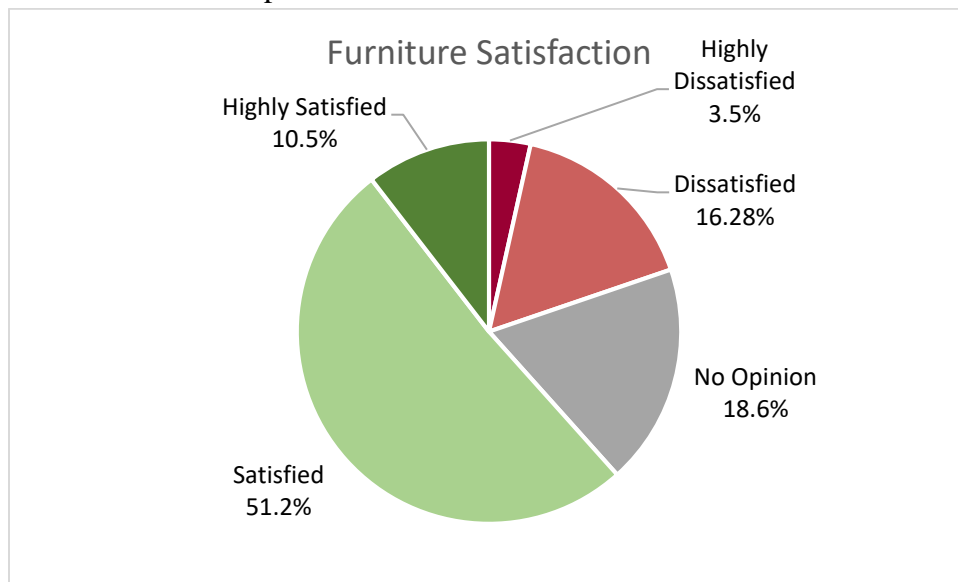


Figure 11: Furniture Satisfaction of Acorn Residents

Students are either content with the amount of furniture provided or expressed a desire for more. Residents generally seemed to be satisfied with the types and quantity of furniture provided, but residents were not pleased with the quality, age, and cleanliness of the furniture. When asked to provide an optional comment about the rating of furniture satisfaction in the survey, 30 residents provided feedback. Of the 30 comments regarding furniture satisfaction, 21 wrote that the furniture was “old” and/or “dirty”, with 15 of these specifically referencing the couches. Couches specifically appeared to be a large source of discontentment for residents.

In addition to the furniture dissatisfaction, it was also found that Crawford residents felt the carpets were also old and dirty. The state of the carpets caused many residents we talked to, to feel discomfort throughout their flat.

4.4.5 Finding 13: Wi-Fi was the second greatest cause of dissatisfaction among residents

When asking residents to rate the wireless internet in the flats, we found that 45.3% of residents surveyed considered themselves either dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied with the provided Wi-Fi. The breakdown of students’ ratings can be seen below.

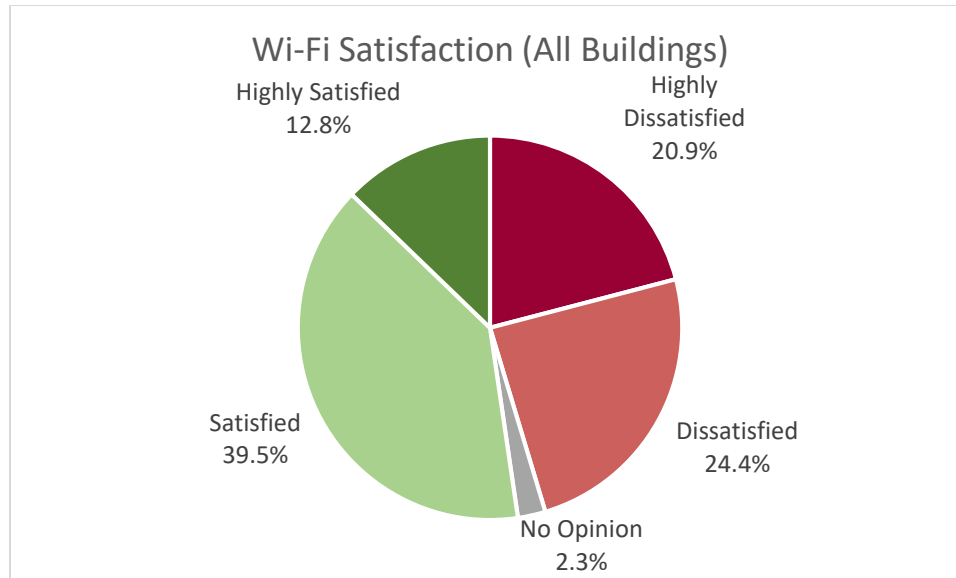


Figure 12: Wi-Fi Satisfaction of Acorn Residents

The main concerns regarding the network as voiced in the comments left by survey respondents were the internet constantly cutting out or slowing down as well as concerns about the network being unsecure and having no password. During the time we conducted this study, Acorn updated the Wi-Fi infrastructure in Crawford Passage. Residents living in Crawford have stated that the Wi-Fi greatly improved after the upgrade and satisfaction from Crawford residents was much higher than the average found across all of Acorn's buildings. The graph below shows the breakdown of satisfaction from Crawford residents.

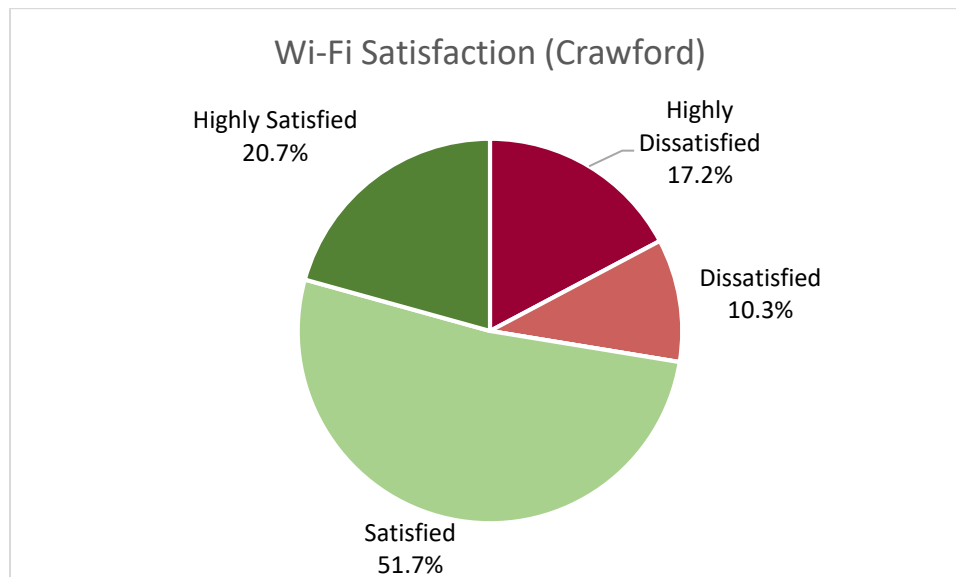


Figure 13: Wi-Fi Satisfaction of Crawford Residents

Only 27.5% of Crawford residents considered themselves dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied, much less than the overall dissatisfaction rate across all Acorn buildings. Crawford residents still had concerns with the lack of privacy on the unsecured network. Having spoken to residents in

Crawford before the upgrade of the wireless network, we saw similar concerns about the network cutting out and being unreliable, however, after the upgrade, these concerns significantly decreased implying the upgrade of the network was able to resolve several of these issues and increase satisfaction.

4.5 Finding 14: Acorn is currently implementing solutions to many of the issues discovered

After working with Acorn staff for the duration of this project, it became clear that Acorn was already taking action to resolve many of our findings regarding communication, flat storage satisfaction, and flat turnover. It is too early to know if these attempts will be effective solutions, as not enough time has passed since their implementation. One example of a solution that Acorn has currently implemented in attempt to resolve communication issues between maintenance and residents, is an online ticketing system for maintenance requests the staff call the Workforce Portal. This system allows residents to submit a ticket with the details of the maintenance request and allows maintenance to leave notes and send messages to residents with updates. This will also keep residents in the loop for projects that are not immediately completed. There was also an effort to improve the accuracy of inventory records. Acorn has created and implemented a spreadsheet to track inventory in Acorn storage buildings that contain different items for the flats. By tracking this data in one central place, it ensures the staff are less likely to be short inventory when they need to replace different items, such as kitchenware, during turnover.

During our time in London, the team were unable to visit or receive feedback from residents living in Kamen House. During our time in London, the team was unable to visit or receive feedback from residents living in Kamen House. However, the Acorn staff informed us that, to improve resident satisfaction, Kamen flats did have room features such as hooks, bed risers, and overall bigger wardrobes that allowed for more storage space. This shows that Acorn is aware of some of the issues present in the flats and is actively looking to address them.

5.0 Recommendations

Based on our findings, we have presented six recommendations below that could help Acorn improve both resident and client satisfaction if implemented. Some of these recommendations will allow Acorn to monitor and explore areas of improvement that can be pursued in the future to further increase client satisfaction.

5.1 Recommendation 1: Introduce a digital survey to attain continual resident feedback

We recommend that Acorn fully digitize the survey process and allocate resources to ensuring that this survey is answered, and the resulting data put to use. Appendix F is a series of questions we recommend for Acorn's future use. Continually receiving customer feedback from a survey allows Acorn to get a standardized sense of overall trends in client satisfaction. By identifying these trends through satisfaction ratings, the survey can accurately pinpoint factors that greatly affect customer satisfaction and which factors are less crucial.

Surveys allow Acorn to get feedback on new features being implemented. Also contained in Appendix F are possible questions to be used at Acorn's discretion to monitor the effectiveness of the recommendations outlined in this chapter. These are questions 8 – 11, which correspond to recommendations 2, 3, 4, and 6. We do, however, recommend that the survey does not exceed 10 questions in order to maintain a high response rate, so questions should be switched in and out as they become more or less relevant.

We recognize that it can be difficult to get residents to complete surveys, so as part of this recommendation we have included a few tips we have found to increase the rate of response. First, we kept questions simple and short. This includes keeping any questions that require much involvement (i.e. written responses more than a couple of words long) explicitly optional. Secondly, offering a prize of up to £50 provided us a hook which incentivized many to spend a couple of minutes out of their day completing the survey rather than ignoring the survey. Thirdly, if possible, we know from past studies that reminding participants to take the survey every so often is proven to increase interest in the survey. Below is a graph that was taken from a previous IQP that conducted survey work in the borough of Brent. In the graph, reminders were sent out on April 4, and as a result, the number of responses increased.

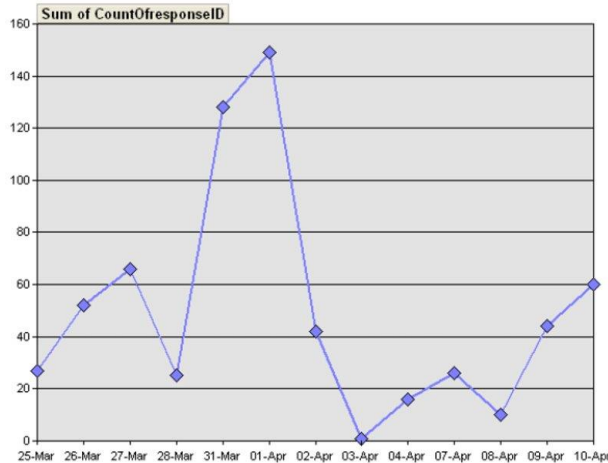


Figure 14: Survey responses over time

To get more responses we advise allowing a few weeks for respondents to take the survey and not only distributing surveys at the very end of resident stays.

To distribute Acorn’s new survey, we recommend making use of Typeform’s online surveying platform. We recommend that Acorn consider how much they wish survey data to play a role with operations and make the decision between using the free plan or the Essentials or Professional plan. The only difference between Essentials and Professional is that Essentials can be paid for on a monthly basis, whereas Professionals is a yearly fee (but the cost per month is the same). At the moment, we recommend starting with the free plan until the process for distributing surveys and accruing responses is streamlined. If Acorn wants the ability to run more in-depth, real-time analysis of issues across buildings or to get a better picture of its performance over time, we recommend upgrading to either the Essentials or Professional plan. This plan starts at £28 per month and comes with features such as the ability to add Acorn’s logo or accept more responses.

However, if Acorn wants to cut down on the time or resources spent transferring data to Google Sheets, SurveyMonkey’s Advanced Plan presents a good alternative. Typeform and Google Spreadsheets show breakdowns of answers but do not present the level of analysis offered by SurveyMonkey without some work and knowledge on how to process the data. Therefore, we recommend using Typeform unless Acorn wants high-level analysis without doing much extra work.

5.2 Recommendation 2: Create an area guide for residents based on suggestions from past residents

Before arriving in London, the team identified housing location as one of the most influential factors of resident satisfaction for two different reasons: having a safe neighborhood and being near points of interest. This background research was reconfirmed through our interviews with clients of Acorn, as a majority indicated that location was a top priority in their search for student accommodation, as noted in Finding 11. While universities recognize the value of the surrounding area, students tend to take longer to appreciate the area and what it has

to offer. We feel that if students had a better understanding of the interesting places and other fun activities in their area, they would come to appreciate Acorn's housing location more quickly. In turn, this would increase satisfaction as residents would better understand one of the primary reasons for choosing Acorn.

To accelerate this process of helping residents explore their surrounding area, we suggest that Acorn create a guide for residents outlining different and interesting places residents can find near them. Currently, Acorn provides each flat with an informational binder that also includes a five-page list of different things to do and places to explore. We feel that this list can be useful to residents, however, the way in which the information is presented could be improved upon. We have determined that a small, potentially trifold, pamphlet would be the best option and recommend that Acorn format the information from the current lists in this way. This pamphlet would be more accessible and more easily distributed, as it can be handed to each resident, upon check-in. The current list of suggestions has too many options and may overwhelm the residents with the information. Therefore, a pamphlet would be an effective way to represent the highlights of the area without overloading residents with information and providing visuals for some of the listed recommendations. Below is one possible design of for the pamphlet, with all three designs included in Appendix D



Figure 15: Sample Design of Area Guide Brochure

This new form of displaying interesting aspects about the area would not be as extensive of a list as the current one, it is important to carefully choose what information gets included. During our interviews, it was proposed that the new guide should be based on resident input.

Considering that the majority of Acorn's residents are students, this pamphlet could be a better way of enabling residents to appreciate the location better. To determine what information should be included in the new pamphlet, we suggest adding a question into Acorn's new feedback survey that asks students to provide one place or activity in the area that they would recommend to future students living in Acorn. As a result of this question, Acorn could compile a list of different food spots, markets, attractions, activities, and other points of interest. The suggestions mentioned most frequently would then be included. Given that Acorn has locations in both Farringdon and Bloomsbury, it would be more beneficial to create two different pamphlets for each location. Each pamphlet would be tailored to the features of the two different locations but also include some suggestions that overlap.

5.3 Recommendation 3: Improve flat turnover process

Based on the amount of maintenance needed by residents and the number of items missing from inventory upon arrival, the flat turnover process is not successfully being carried out between each resident (45% of students needed maintenance on arrival). Acorn staff are ideally supposed to check what items are missing from flats and have them replaced before new residents move in. Acorn informed us that a spreadsheet for storeroom inventory tracking was recently implemented. While it is too early to determine if the new spreadsheet has been beneficial, its addition is most likely a step in the right direction. Part of the problem of incomplete turnover practices can be attributed to the short amount of time between resident move out and move in and inadequate training of Acorn staff conducting inventory checks. Acorn facilities staff is constantly changing, so a formalized training routine of inventory and the flat turnover process needs to be successfully enforced. Often, residents move out in the morning and new residents move in during the late afternoon of the same day. Either more time needs to be allocated for turnover between residents, more staff assigned to carry out tasks during turnover, or the actual turnover process and training process be reanalyzed and restructured to emphasize efficiency and effectiveness.

We also recommended that upon move-in residents receive an inventory list of items/supplies that come included in the flat in order to verify if the resident received the proper inventory. Talking to Acorn staff revealed that leaving inventory lists for residents is not a current practice. Certain residents we spoke to voiced concerns about not knowing what items were missing in the flats and if they would be penalized for items marked as missing that were never initially provided. With the addition of an inventory list, residents can comfortably know what items are standard in the flat and know what items are missing.

5.4 Recommendation 4: Make modifications to the resident orientation model

Currently, Acorn holds an orientation for each group of student residents detailing Acorn's housing policies and rules, how to handle certain issues, and briefly what to expect from the flats. Although each group gets an orientation at the beginning of their stay, through our interviews we found that not all the orientations are as thorough as others. For example, orientation for some groups include a walkthrough of the flat with a member of the maintenance staff to give brief explanations on how to use certain appliances or items in the flat.

We recommend improving the orientation given at the beginning of stays to make the orientations more informative and in turn, reduce the number of issues that cause dissatisfaction early in the student residents' stay. Acorn currently conducts orientation on the student residents' day of arrival. We feel this is not the best time to do so because student residents are unfamiliar with the flats, so they are not aware of all the potential issues they have. Additionally, if orientation is on arrival day, the students may not pay as close attention as they would since they may be jetlagged and tired from travelling. Instead of a day one orientation, we suggest that Acorn has a person checking in with the residents during the first forty-eight hours of the stay to address any issues and questions that arise during this early period. This could help catch early problems and possibly reduce the number of maintenance jobs requested for issues that could have been avoided if the students had proper instructions for certain appliances in the flat.

In addition to an improved orientation, including maintenance walkthroughs, we also recommend that Acorn enable its university clients to conduct a pre-arrival orientation to prepare students of what they should expect coming to London and living at Acorn, especially in regards to different standards of living. From our interviews we learned that many of the universities already conduct some form of pre-arrival orientation, however, these are usually more general orientations where housing is a minor topic covered. We suggest that Acorn compile a list of certain aspects of living in the Acorn flats and living in London that they feel the students should know about beforehand, such as what cookware will be provided or how to use washing machines or showers. Organizing a pre-arrival orientation can help to reduce resident dissatisfaction caused by students' heightened expectations.

5.5 Recommendation 5: Continue renovations and refurbishing of older buildings

Based on information from Acorn itself, we know there is uncertainty as to whether Acorn will renovate some of its older buildings. More specifically, we know Crawford and Bakers Row will be renovated if circumstances and finances allow. We recommend renovations and refurbishing continue in all properties as circumstances allow.

5.5.1 Short Term Recommendations

We believe the following recommendations are inexpensive and quick and can be addressed in the near future.

To address client concerns regarding lack of storage solutions, we propose adding hooks on which to hang coats, jackets, sweatshirts or towels around the flat. These provide quick access to more frequently used outer garments, give rain-soaked clothes a place to dry and allow residents to have more room to hang things inside their closet. Utilizing replaceable, inexpensive, and non-damaging hooks such as Command Hooks allows for a fast and simple solution to expand flat storage.

Additionally, we recommend adding risers under beds to increase the available space and allow residents to store things under their beds. One common issue for residents is finding a place to store their suitcases, so we recommend making the height of the bed risers at least the height of a typical lying down suitcase, roughly 30 centimeters.

Another recommendation pertains to the covers on the couches. The covers on the couches are replaceable, and the current rate at which the covers are replaced or cleaned does not seem to be happening as frequently as residents would like. We recommend that couch covers either be replaced or cleaned more often than currently taking place.

5.5.2 Long Term Recommendation

The following recommendations are ones to be addressed when the necessary resources become available.

We recommend that Crawford and Bakers Row be renovated when possible. From what we have gathered, the condition of Crawford and Bakers Row is of some concern to clients for a variety of reasons. Some clients choose to avoid these flats if possible, and the most extreme cases of dissatisfaction appeared to come from residents who lived in Crawford. The flats in Crawford and Bakers Row have many features that are due for an update and these features cause significant dissatisfaction. We have identified that much of the furniture could be updated; dressers and wardrobes are not as sturdy as they could be, thus risking breakage in the future and undermining resident confidence in the quality of the accommodations. As Acorn is aware, the carpets in Crawford are also in poor condition, and some of the boilers need to be updated, so we recommend those steps be taken as well since both contribute to improving satisfaction (though hot water should be more of a priority).

We recommend that couches across all properties be evaluated and replaced with more frequency. As can be seen in Finding 9, the volume and content of complaints pertaining to couches revealed how much residents are concerned about cleanliness, sturdiness, and discomfort. Therefore, we recommend that the couches be replaced.

We recommend addressing laundry facilities in the long run. Some of the issues with laundry, such as an insufficient number of machines to a building or wash/dry cycles taking too long can be fixed by installing new machines, increasing the number of machines, and regularly maintaining them. For buildings with shared laundry facilities, increasing the number of machines is relevant. If newer machines are introduced in these buildings, residents living further from the laundry facilities would benefit from a mobile application connected to a system that keeps track of which machines are in use to improve satisfaction. This can cut down on the amount of time residents spend waiting for a machine to be free and encourage residents to remove their laundry more quickly, thus freeing up machines more quickly.

5.6 Recommendation 6: Introduce a dedicated staff position for client affairs

We recommend the company create a new client affairs position with the responsibility of corresponding with residents and university officials during their stay in Acorn properties. Based on our findings, many clients and staff at Acorn feel a dedicated client affairs person would resolve many of the communication issues that sometimes exist between clients, residents, and Acorn. Having a dedicated member of staff that residents can contact about smaller issues they feel do not necessarily warrant a full maintenance ticket or other escalation to Acorn will raise satisfaction. We also recommend that this staff member is someone that can relate to the main student demographic and someone that students feel comfortable interacting with. This

ensures resident issues are not dismissed as unimportant, avoiding making the resident feel ignored and further lowering satisfaction. As mentioned, Acorn staff also showed interest in creating this position. The sales team explained to us that often residents feel as though they cannot bring issues to the sales team despite the sales team currently acting as the liaison with the university clients. With no clear individual holding the position of client affairs, residents are unaware of whom they should contact regarding general comments or questions. This individual could take on many of the resident-facing jobs such as a direct point of contact for residents as mentioned, or other tasks such as facilitating the orientation when student groups first arrive, allowing the students to meet the client affairs individual and begin building a relationship so students are comfortable bring issues and other complaints up with Acorn instead of allowing the issues to persist and lower their levels of client satisfaction.

6.0 Conclusion

Throughout this project, the team worked with a housing company in London, Acorn of London. The main goal of this project was to identify resident satisfaction and determine ways in which Acorn could improve resident satisfaction and client relations moving forward. This was primarily accomplished using interviews, surveys, and a focus group, along with background research. The primary targets for data collection included current students living in Acorn, university liaisons who determine housing for groups of students studying abroad, and some select staff of Acorn. The data collected was then used to develop a set of recommendations that Acorn could implement within the company to improve overall client and resident satisfaction, and as a result of doing so, potentially improve as a business. We supplied Acorn with new survey questions to implement in the future and also recommendations of which platform to distribute the survey digitally. Finally, a spreadsheet containing information about other housing companies in London was compiled and given to Acorn to better help them understand what other housing companies have to offer and at what price.

The results of this project not only benefit Acorn as a company but also the numerous students that use Acorn for housing during their studies. Improving resident satisfaction allows students to potentially better focus on schoolwork and not worry about the stresses that tend to accompany unhappiness regarding unsatisfactory living situations. The happier students are about their housing, the more likely that those students would recommend Acorn housing to future students.

Though, even while this project concludes, there are still many areas within Acorn that could be focused upon in future projects to further facilitate improvement as a company. The Acorn website is not as up to date as it could be, and improvement to the website and search engine optimization could garner more business for Acorn. Other potential project areas include continuing this project, however, with a new focus on independently booked residents rather than university-related clients due to Acorn indicating this is a growing demographic in its business.

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Appendix A: Student Housing Survey

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey on student satisfaction regarding student housing provided by Acorn of London. This is a research project being conducted by Sabrina Cacapit, Julia DeLo, Joseph Murphy, and Javier Salido, students attending Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in this research and if you wish, you may exit this survey at any time without penalty. We want to learn more about how satisfied students are with Acorn provided housing. In this survey we will ask multiple choice and short answer questions regarding your satisfaction level regarding your housing. This survey should take approximately three (3) minutes to complete.

BENEFITS & RISKS

You will not receive any direct benefits by taking part in this research study, however your responses may help us get a better understanding of how Acorn can improve its accommodations by gathering student feedback. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The answers collected in this survey will then be stored by Qualtrics, the software used to distribute the survey, in an electronic format. All data collected from this survey will remain anonymous as Qualtrics does not collect any identifying information.

CONTACT

If you have any questions or concerns about the study at any time, you may contact our project advisor, Professor John Orr via email at orr@wpi.edu.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT

Please check one box below. Checking the “Agree” box indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate in this study

Agree

Disagree

Which building do you live in?

Bakers Row

- Bedford Place
- Bloomsbury Place
- Byng Place
- Crawford Passage
- Gower St
- Kamen House

Please select your level of satisfaction regarding your stay with Acorn of London:

	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
Kitchen Stovetop					
Kitchen Oven					
Kitchenware					
Laundry					

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did you give the kitchen this rating?

	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
Bathroom Sink					
Bathroom Shower					
Bathroom Toilet					

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did you give the bathroom this rating?

	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
Bedroom Closet/Storage					
Bedroom Size					
Bed/Bedding					

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did you give the bedroom this rating?

	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
Television Set					
Provided Furniture					
Temperature Control					
Wi-Fi					
Flat Location					

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did you give these ratings?

	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
Cleaning Services					
Maintenance Assistance (If applicable)					

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did you give these ratings?

First Impressions:

When you first arrived at Acorn, what were your thoughts on the following?

Move-in process:

- Very Easy
- Easy
- Somewhat Troublesome
- Very Troublesome

Flat Cleanliness:

- Very Clean
- Suitably Clean
- Somewhat Dirty
- Very Dirty

Did anything require maintenance upon arrival? (before you used it)

- Yes
- No

If yes, what needed maintenance?

General Questions:

Did you reserve your stay with Acorn yourself?

- Yes
- No

If yes, why did you choose Acorn? (Example: location, cost, size, speed of response...)

How did you hear about/find Acorn of London?

- Acorn Website
- Non-Acorn Website
- Friend/Family
- University
- Other

If you chose other, please specify.

(Optional) Is there anything else you would like to tell Acorn? (Example: complaints, compliments, general comments...)

(Optional) If you would like to be entered into the prize drawing of a £50 Amazon gift card and/or contacted to participate in a future focus group please provide an email address that we may reach you at. To be eligible for the £50 gift card you must also make a post on Instagram

tagging @acornoflondon however if you choose not to you can still be eligible for a £20 Amazon gift card. If you are chosen to participate in the focus group regarding student satisfaction at Acorn housing, you will also have the chance to win a 2 night stay with Acorn for up to 5 people. The reward must be redeemed for a stay between February and November 2020 (Except April 9-12, 2020 and May-July 2020). Booking is subject to availability.

Appendix B: Student Focus Group Questions

1. How would you describe your current accommodations?
 - a. What do you particularly like about your housing?
 - b. What do you particularly dislike about your housing?
 - c. Do you feel like there is anything missing from your current living space?
 - d. Is there anything you would like to see changed or added to your apartment?

2. What are your thoughts on the kitchen and bathroom provided in your apartment?
 - a. How do you feel about the size of the kitchen?
 - b. Do you feel that the kitchen is adequately equipped?
 - i. Are there enough cooking utensils and cutlery?
 - ii. Are the appliances provided useful?
 - iii. Do the appliance work?
 - iv. Is there anything that you feel is missing from the kitchen space?
 - c. How do you feel about the size of your bathroom?
 - d. How do you feel about the bathroom's shower, sink, and toilet?

3. What are your thoughts on your bedroom in your current accommodation?
 - a. What kind of bedroom are you in (single, double, triple)?
 - b. Do you feel like you have enough storage?
 - c. Is there anything you feel is missing from the bedroom?

4. How would you describe your common living space?
 - a. How do you feel about the size of this common living space?
 - b. What furniture is provided?
 - i. How do you feel about the provided furniture?
 - ii. Is there anything that you would like to see added/removed?

5. Have you ever requested services or maintenance from Acorn?
 - a. How would you rate their response (time to respond, time for work to be completed)?
 - b. Is there any additional service you would like Acorn to provide?

6. How did you book your housing with Acorn?
 - a. How did you hear about Acorn of London?
 - b. Would you recommend Acorn of London to others? Why?

Appendix C: University Interview Questions

1. What group or university do you represent or book for?
 - a. Why do you need housing in London?
 - b. How long have you been booking student groups for?
 - c. Roughly how many people are you booking for this year or in past years?
 - d. What is the typical length of stay for your groups?
 - e. If more than London, how many different locations are you responsible for booking for?
 - f. What other organizations have you booked with in London?
 - g. Do you have connections to any London universities / do your students study at UK universities?
 - h. How often do you reevaluate where to house the students?
2. What are your priorities when finding places to stay?
 - a. Price, location (access to public transportation, things-to-do), amenities (laundry, kitchen, heating/cooling, package delivery)?
 - i. What is the typical price per student that you shoot for?
 - ii. How or why has the cost per student changed?
 - iii. How does the Acorn price compare to that of other companies you considered?
 - b. Students per room / size of rooms?
 - c. Good past reviews / ratings?
 - d. Are there any red flags when checking out a company / location that you avoid?
3. How did you first hear about Acorn?
4. How long have you been booking with Acorn?
 - a. Has there been anything that made you want to reevaluate your decision?
5. If you switched to Acorn from another provider, why did you switch?
6. What feedback have you gotten from faculty / students staying with Acorn?
 - a. Are there any common trends in the feedback / complaints?
 - b. In general, how quick is Acorn to respond to concerns / service requests?
 - c. In general, how satisfied are faculty and students with how Acorn resolves concerns / service requests?
7. What other services / amenities does Acorn provide? (Such as access to local facilities, oyster cards, etc.)
8. How would you describe the booking process with Acorn?
 - a. How long was the booking process?
 - b. Have you had any issues with billing?

Appendix D: Mock-ups of Area Guide Pamphlet

Design 1:



Activities

- ❖ The London Eye
- ❖ Sky Garden
- ❖ The British Museum
- ❖ The Museum of London
- ❖ The Angel Comedy Club
 - ❖ At the Camden Head



Office: 020 7636 8325



www.acorn-london.co.uk

Acorn Emergency Phone:
079 601 51690
 5pm-8:30am Mon-Fri,
 Weekends



@acornoflondon

Welcome

ACORN



Drink

- ❖ The Piano Works
- ❖ Betsey Trotwood
- ❖ Wetherspoons
- ❖ The Eagle
- ❖ The Coach
- ❖ The Horseshoe
- ❖ The Gunmakers



Food

- ❖ Leather Lane Market
 - ❖ Mon-Fri: 11am – 2:30pm
- ❖ Fish Plaice
- ❖ Franco Manca
- ❖ Terroni & Sons
- ❖ The King of Falafel
- ❖ Tohbang
- ❖ Ngon Ngon



Shopping

- ❖ Camden Market
 - ❖ Arts, handmade jewelry, vintage clothing, food stalls
- ❖ Oxford Street
 - ❖ Street of popular clothing shops
- ❖ Covent Gardens
 - ❖ Clothing shops, restaurants, street performers

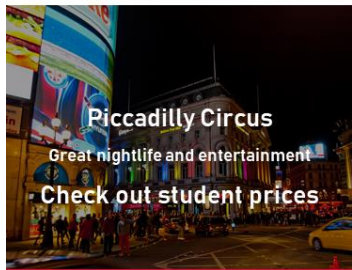
Design 2:



The British Museum
Over 8 million works
Free General Admission

Other Activities

The Museum of London
Sky Garden
The Angel Comedy Club
The London Eye
Shrek's Adventure



Piccadilly Circus
Great nightlife and entertainment
Check out student prices


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Weekends

 @acornoflondon

Welcome
ACORN



Betsey Trotwood
Shabby chic pub with cellar gig venue
Closed on Sundays
£-££



Camden Market
Numerous adjoining retail markets
£-££

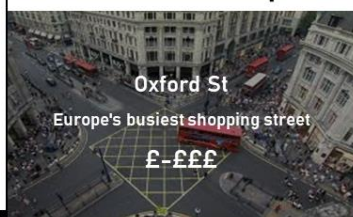


Terroni & Sons
Cozy Italian - pasta, treats, and more
££

Drinks Near You

The Gunmakers
Wetherspoons
The Horseshoe
The Three Kings
The Bowler
BrewDog

Places to Shop



Oxford St
Europe's busiest shopping street
£-£££

Food Near You

Tohbang - Korean
Pizza Pilgrims - Pizza
Tikkarito - Indian Street Food
Great - Greek
Chicken Ranch - Fried Chicken
Ngon Ngon - Vietnamese

3-5 minutes walk!



The Piano Works
Bar/restaurant with constant live music
Tues-Fri: 5PM - 1AM
Sat: 12PM - 1AM
£-££



Streets to Explore

Covent Garden
Shopping, food, and entertainment hub
££-£££



Leather Lane Market
Tasty street food from around the world
Mon-Fri: 11AM - 2:30PM
£-££

Design 3:

**Need Something?
Start Here!**

Grocery Store:
Sainsbury's
Tesco
Co-op

Health and Beauty:
Boots
Superdrug

Department Store:
Argo's
Marks & Spencer

Phone Carrier:
02
Vodafone



Office: 020 7636 8325



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5pm-8:30am Mon-Fri
Weekends

 **@acornoflondon**

Welcome



ACORN



Betsey Trotwood
Shabby chic pub with cellar gig venue
Closed on Sundays
£-££



The British Museum
Over 8 million works
Free General Admission



Terroni & Sons
Cozy Italian - pasta, treats, and more
££

Drinks Near You

- The Gunmakers
- Wetherspoons
- The Horseshoe
- The Three Kings
- The Bowler
- BrewDog

Other Activities

- The Museum of London
- Sky Garden
- The Angel Comedy Club
- The London Eye
- Shrek's Adventure

Food Near You

- Tohbang - Korean
- Pizza Pilgrims - Pizza
- Tikkarito - Indian Street Food
- Daddy Donkey - Mexican Street Food
- Great - Greek
- Chicken Ranch - Fried Chicken
- Ngon Ngon - Vietnamese

The Piano Works
Bar/restaurant with constant live music
Tues-Fri: 5PM - 1AM
Sat: 12PM - 1AM
£-££

Piccadilly Circus
Great nightlife and entertainment
Check out student prices

Leather Lane Market
Tasty street food from around the world
Mon-Fri: 11AM - 2:30PM
£-££

Appendix E: Past Acorn Survey Questions

(This text was transcribed directly from past surveys administered by Acorn)

Acorn

How Are We Doing?

Flat Name:

Flat Address:

We are committed to providing you with the best Housing experience possible, so we welcome your comments. Please fill out this questionnaire and leave it in your apartment with your keys upon check out. Thank you.

1. Please rate the quality of the service you received from Reception.

Disappointing Poor Average Good Exceptional

2. Was your Receptionist.

a. Courteous? Yes | No

b. Informative? Yes | No

c. Prompt and efficient? Yes | No

d. No Opinion Yes | No

3. Please rate the quality of our Housekeeping.

Disappointing Poor Average Good Exceptional

4. Please rate the quality of Maintenance.

Disappointing Poor Average Good Exceptional

5. Was your apartment clean upon arrival?

Disappointing Poor Average Good Exceptional

6. Please rate your experience with the wi-fi performance.

Disappointing Poor Average Good Exceptional

7. Please rate your overall experience with Acorn?

Disappointing Poor Average Good Exceptional

8. Would you recommend our Housing to a friend?

Yes | No

Why, or why not?

-
9. Please share any additional comments/suggestions or improvements.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and we wish you a safe and pleasant journey home.

Appendix F: Recommended Acorn Survey Questions

1) Which Acorn building do you live in?

- Bakers Row
- Bedford Place
- Bloomsbury Place
- Byng Place
- Crawford Passage
- Gower St
- Kamen House

2) How would you rate your level of satisfaction regarding the kitchen?

Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did you give the kitchen this rating?

3) How would you rate your level of satisfaction regarding the bathroom?

Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did you give the bathroom this rating?

4) How would you rate your level of satisfaction regarding the bedroom?

Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did you give the bedroom this rating?

5) How would you rate your level of satisfaction with these features?

	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
Provided Furniture					
Wi-Fi					

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did you give these ratings?

6) How would you rate your level of satisfaction with these services?

	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
Cleaning Services					
Maintenance Assistance (If applicable)					

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did you give these ratings?

7) Overall, how would you rate your stay with Acorn?

Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied

(Optional) Is there anything else you would like to tell Acorn? (Example: complaints, compliments, general comments...)

8) Points of Interest:

What places do you think other students would like to know about when they stay with Acorn?

9) First Impressions:

When you first arrived at Acorn, what were your thoughts on the following?

a) Flat Cleanliness:

- Very Clean
- Suitably Clean
- Somewhat Dirty
- Very Dirty

b) Did anything require maintenance upon arrival? (before you used it)

- Yes
- No

If yes, what needed maintenance?

11) Acorn Orientation:

a) Did you receive orientation from an Acorn representative at the start of your stay?

Yes/No

b) How would you rate the orientation you received?

Very Helpful	Helpful	No Opinion	Unhelpful

(Optional) What did you find helpful about the orientation, or what would you have liked to learn from it?

10) How would you rate your experience with our client affairs team?

Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied

(Optional) In a sentence or two, why did they deserve this rating?
