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**Laundry Service
JCR Review and Proposals
First Revision**

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Prepared for:

JCR Committee 2007-8

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Contents

- i. Objectives
- ii. Introduction
- iii. Part I – Research into current processes
- iv. Part II – Research into alternative processes
- v. Part III – Possible alternatives to current processes
- vi. Conclusions

Objectives

- To examine the current system in place to provide laundry facilities for the students of Downing College
- To examine how other Cambridge colleges provide equivalent services to their students
- To determine if any improvements can be made to the current system or if an entirely new system altogether could be implemented
- Any new system would need to be on a 'no-additional-cost' basis for the College

Introduction

This revision of the original report aims to address most of the major areas of contention highlighted during the original report's review by the JCR and the College. In particular, the edited conclusion will be more realistic regarding the feasibility of implementing new procedures and practices regarding the laundry service provided.

I will begin this report by analysing the current system used by the College to provide a laundry service to students, before carrying out research into how other Cambridge colleges provide a similar service to their students. I will then look at the feasibility of creating a new system for the College to implement which will resolve most, if not all, of the current problems which exist.

This report is written from the point of view of a student, but I will draw on evidence for all arguments and will conclude with clear recommendations as to how both the JCR and the college can proceed with a system which is hopefully beneficial to, but at least fair to both parties.

Before this report is delivered to the relevant College authorities it will be subject to approval of the entire JCR Committee. Any questions, suggestions or complaints regarding this report should be made to the JCR Services Officer.

Part I – Research Into Current Processes

Downing College currently hold a contract with Associated Laundry Systems Ltd (ALS). The terms of this contract place an obligation on ALS to provide facilities for

286 members of the undergraduate population of Downing to wash and dry their clothes when necessary. This means that ALS must provide maintenance support when the machines break down, refurbish the laundry rooms up to every three years and provide a system of payment so students can be charged for the use of the facilities.

ALS provide 6 washing machines and 7 tumble driers in two locations on the main campus of the college which any member of the student population can use. There is a further laundry room attached to the Singer Building. The cost for a single wash is £1.20 and an hour in a tumble drier costs £1.50.

Currently, pre-pay laundry cards are used to pay for Laundry. These can be topped up in multiples of £10 only in the Porter's Lodge. This system is deemed to be safer than having coin or token boxes in the laundry rooms, which have proved to be a target for theft in the past.

There are a number of limitations in the current payment system. While the original report highlighted the potential risk of losing cards, it seems that a more major concern is the susceptibility of the current card-based system to fraud, with a number of loopholes available to be exploited by users. Also it is the opinion of the JCR Committee that having to spend £10 in one go up to twice a term feels like a kick-in-the-teeth just to pay for laundry, especially as £10 can be the equivalent to a seventh of a weekly budget.

The current system to obtain refunds for incorrect charges is also an area of contention, and can take a fortnight or longer to get the card back from ALS

Currently the College receives a fixed payment of £1,500 per year from ALS to site and maintain washing machines on the Domus. In return ALS receives all takings from the facilities. The College uses this money to pay for the running costs of the washers and driers, including the water, electricity and gas. ALS uses their money to pay for the maintenance and renovation of the laundry machines and rooms.

Some houses in Lensfield Road have laundry facilities available for the use of residents for no extra charge. The cost of these facilities is offset by an increase in room rents. This is partly to make up for the difference in quality between Lensfield rooms and rooms on Domus.

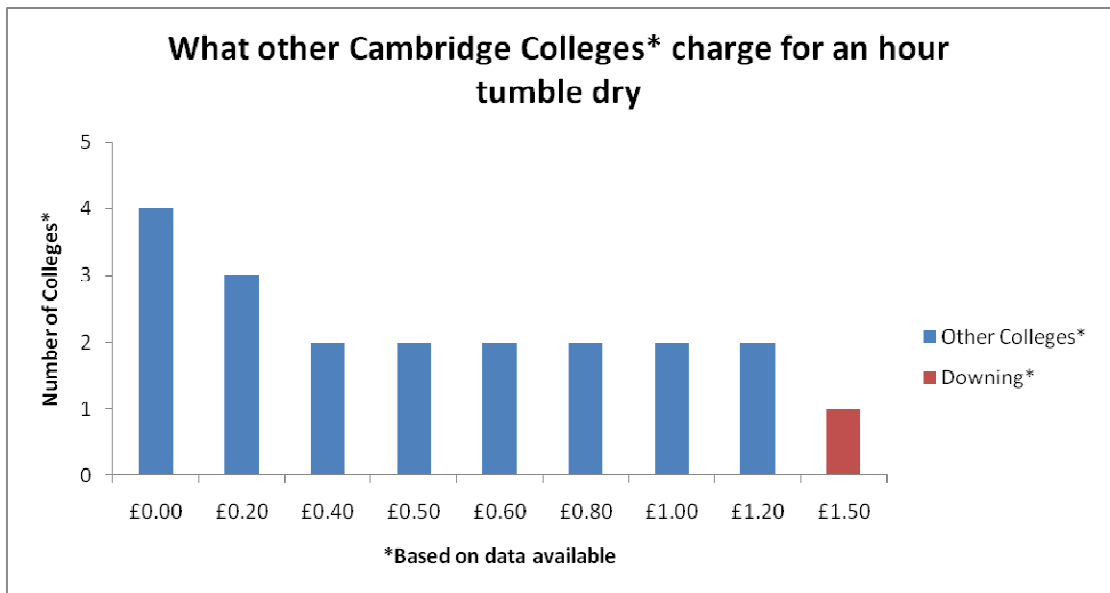
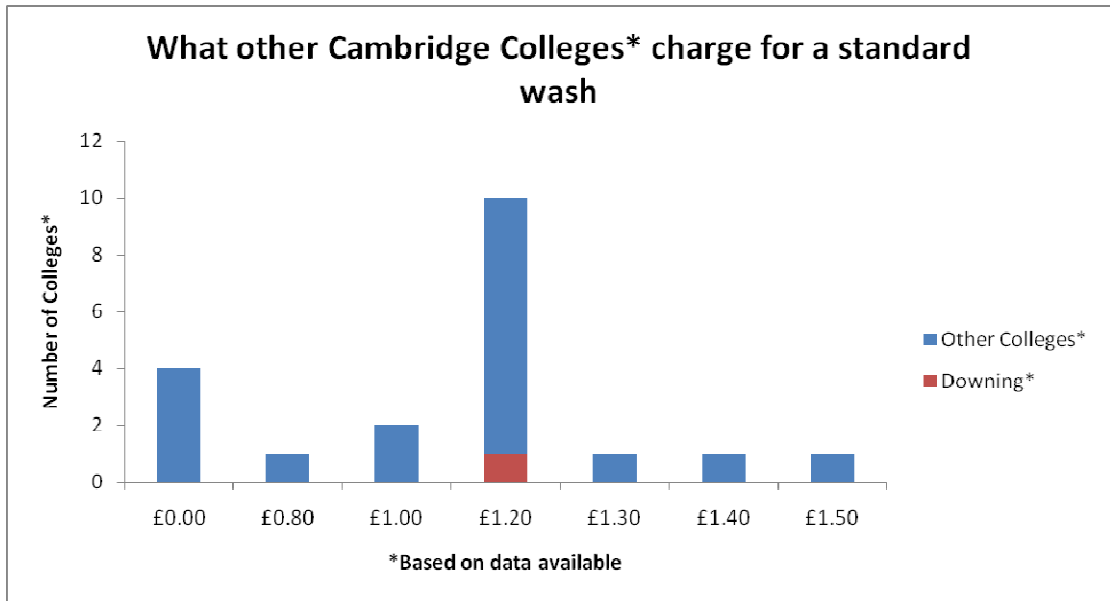
To sum up; the college currently receives £1,500 per annum which goes towards paying for the running costs of the laundry facilities and an estimated further £4720¹ per annum is given to ALS for the maintenance of those facilities as required.

Part II – Research Into Alternative Processes

Following a request for information, a number of JCR (or CSU) Officers from other Cambridge colleges provided an overview (in varying detail) of how the laundry facilities in their college work. More data was collected following a Freedom of Information Request to a number of other colleges. By collating that data, and making several estimations, a number of charts were produced. The raw data can be found in the appendix.

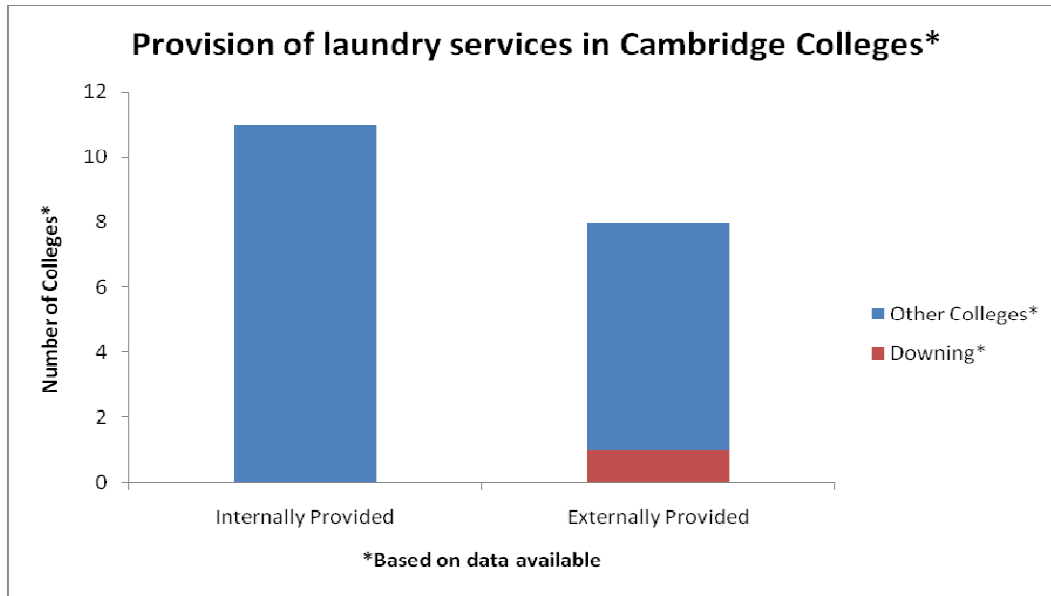
The main area of contention regarding the current system is the cost for the students of Downing. These two charts show how that cost compares to other colleges.

¹ This estimate comes from 286 students paying £20 per year



As these charts show, the cost for an hour tumble dry in Downing is the most expensive of all the colleges which replied. However Downing is average for the cost of washing.

Downing has a privatised provision of laundry facilities for the majority of the undergraduate population. The next chart shows the number of colleges who have privatised laundry facilities compared to those who provide facilities internally, based on the available data.



As this shows, more colleges, of those which replied, have internally provided facilities rather than privatised facilities. This suggests that it is possible to ‘break-even’ when it comes to running an internal system.

Part III – Possible Alternatives to Current Processes

The question now naturally becomes; ‘How can Downing improve its provision of laundry facilities?’ The answer, however, is a little harder to find.

The one overriding factor which will govern any new system is the cost to the College. To create a new internal system to provide laundry to students would require a huge investment in new equipment, with industrial machines costing in excess of £1000. Domestic machines have been declared unsuitable on the basis of amount of use, robustness, life span and reliability. However, an internal system would allow the College the ability to control and improve facilities, while maintaining a much more competitive cost to students. Cofathec could be employed to provide the maintenance for any new internal facilities.

The question of improving the service to undergraduates remains an important issue. One possibility which requires serious consideration is to remove the current pre-pay cards, and replace them with a post-pay based system. This would require students to have a unique card account, similar to the Uniware system used by the catering department, with the total cost of washing being added to the college bill at the end of each term or year. This would remove the need to pay in £10 at a time, and would make refunds much easier to obtain (only having to give in a name, rather than the card). Such a system would need to be ‘online’ so as to have the accounts stored on a central database rather than on cards, it would therefore be much less susceptible to the current method of defrauding the system, increasing the revenue for ALS, and thus preventing any price rises.

The original report contains much greater detail regarding the different ways of raising revenue for an internal system, whether from a yearly ‘Laundry Charge’, to a token-based system. However a number of these ideas are still applicable to an externally provided system. ALS may be willing to accept a yearly payment in the form of a ‘Laundry Charge’ added to each student’s College Bill. This charge could

be used to provide 'free' use of the ALS machines on Domus, however the security of these machines would then become an issue. The possibility of using tokens or a post-pay card system would then require a much closer analysis.

Conclusions

The aim of this revision of the original report was to address a number of concerns muted by both JCR members and some College authorities. I believe the original report was flawed in a number of ways.

Following the original report I felt certain that the external system used by Downing was flawed, and that the only possible remedy was to bring the running of those facilities under College control. Having had numerous discussions with Dick Taplin, the JCR Committee and members of the JCR I believe that this is still the case. However, the initial cost to purchase new machines and create the infrastructure needed to do this is prohibitively high. There is no way it is possible, currently, for the College to begin to provide an internal laundry provision without spending over £6000 on machines alone.

This being said, I still believe that the College could look to the future with the long-term aim of having an internal system. One possible way to do this is to install domestic washers in staircases and houses when they have to be renovated to comply with newer building regulations. This could eventually lead to every staircase having a washer in kitchens.

I believe the immediate aim to improve laundry facilities should be a change to the way in which students pay for laundry. The withdrawal of the disliked and problematic laundry cards should be made a priority. The increased security in the laundry rooms may make tokens a viable option, while the most promising option to be investigated should be the implementation of a 'post-pay' account, be through a card or pin-number, where a term's or year's charge can be added to a student's bill.

Appendix

- Colleges for which at least some data is available;

Christ's College	St Catherine's College
Churchill College	Selwyn College
Claire College	Wolfson College
Corpus Christi	Peterhouse College
Emmanuel College	St John's College
Girton College	Trinity College
Jesus College	Magdalene College
Pembroke College	Fitzwilliam College
Queen's College	Gonville and Caius College
Robinson College	

- Wash and dry costs at other colleges;

Wash Cost Number of Colleges

£0.00	4
£0.80	1
£1.00	2
£1.20	9
£1.30	1
£1.40	1
£1.50	1

Dry Cost

£0.00	4
£0.20	3
£0.40	2
£0.50	2
£0.60	2
£0.80	2
£1.00	2
£1.20	2

- Number of colleges providing facilities;

<u>Internally</u>	11
<u>Externally</u>	7

- Number of students per washer and drier in other colleges;

<u>Wash</u>	40	34	29	31	48	19	35	20	10
<u>Dry</u>	40	34	37	31	55	19	18	40	10
<u>Wash</u>	35	28	44	40	53	32	40	50	41
<u>Dry</u>	18	33	49	40	53	32	31	75	50