

Richard Huish College

Guidelines for Homestay providers - Introduction

International Students tend to choose Homestay accommodation so that they can enjoy home comforts, a family atmosphere, a chance to practise their spoken English and generally learn about the British way of life. Homestay students do not want to simply 'rent a room', but expect to be treated as one of the family. However, we recognise that each individual student may have differing expectations.

For many students this may be their first time away from home. Student backgrounds will vary and they will have very different ideas of home life. Students will value a friendly welcome and opportunity to meet all of the members of the household as soon as possible after their arrival.

Initially, students will be uncertain of the domestic arrangements. Every family has its own domestic routine. To make students feel at home, it is always helpful to explain the ground rules and ensure that these are clear to students early on.

As Homestay providers, you will undoubtedly come across behaviour that you consider 'strange' or 'unusual'. In the first instance, please discuss this with the student, if you can not resolve the situation then please do not hesitate to contact the college for advice.

Students will be encouraged to send a letter or email of introduction prior to arriving in September. This will give both the student and the Homestay provider the opportunity to get to know one another before the student arrives. You may wish to exchange photographs.

Accommodation

A student should have a room where he/she can study and be alone when he/she wishes. The room should be no smaller than 9ft by 9ft (6.5 sq m) and in good decorative order.

As a minimum, every student should have a comfortable full-sized single or double bed, with a good supply of blankets, ample drawer and wardrobe space, a writing desk or table and chair, a mirror and a wastepaper bin. If there is no desk or chair in the bedroom you should allocate a desk/table and chair elsewhere in the home, where the student can study in a quiet environment.

A pin-board will be useful for the display of timetables, posters etc along with adequate lighting by the bed, over the mirror and at the desk.

Students should not be asked to share a room unless this has been arranged in advance; in which two single beds should be provided. Adequate heating should be provided in the room but it is advisable that students are reminded that heaters should not be left switched on overnight or when they are not there. Extra blankets should be available if needed.

We strongly encourage you to discuss from the outset, the areas of the house that the student is allowed to access. It is very important that all parties respect each other's privacy and that the student's bedroom is kept private for him/her.

Some students may not be accustomed to tidying their own clothes or making their own bed. You may have to explain that they must now do these jobs for themselves so that you can clean the room properly. Try to have a regular time for this, preferably when the student is at college.

Bathroom and Toilet

A student should have free access to the bathroom in the same way as the family but you may have to work out a rota for baths and showers. He/she should be able to have a daily bath or shower; showers are usually more popular with students. If you have any particular hot water restrictions or a water meter it is a good idea to make sure your student is aware of them. Ask your student to leave the bathroom clean and tidy after use and make sure that the student understands how to use all facilities. Female students should be informed of the arrangements for the disposal of sanitary towels/tampons.

Bicycles

If your student has a bicycle, please make sure that he/she is fully acquainted with the British Highway Code. It would also be helpful if you can provide secure storage for the student's bicycle.

Culture Shock and Homesickness

Homestay is more than just providing accommodation. It is, as the name suggests, about providing a home and not just a bed. Providing a friendly and secure 'base' for the student becomes increasingly important when you consider that the student may well be suffering from feelings of alienation or even culture shock.

Culture shock is similar to the feelings we have when we are adapting to a new job or other environment, only more so. When people are surrounded by a different culture where everything (including the language) is new and potentially confusing. They go through changes of mood and attitude before coming to terms with their new environment.

These feelings of alienation can be caused by relatively 'minor' things such as unfamiliar food, differences in routine, differences in travel arrangements, and unfamiliar official procedures. They can be exacerbated by the deeper cultural differences in the family life or language.

Many students are initially very excited and positive about a new culture. But as the reality of deeper cultural differences sinks in, this excited feeling wears away. Students may then start to miss friends, family and places as they begin to have doubts about themselves and their new environment. Failure to adjust can bring serious problems for the student and they may experience insecurity, panic and depression.

Culture shock may manifest itself in a wide range of behaviour, from confusion, withdrawal and tiredness to anxiety, irritability, rejection and anger.

If you have a homesick student please contact the college for support. Also ask him/her to talk to you about home and show you photographs of the family. Alternatively, you may have a shy student, in which case; try to anticipate his/her needs – he/she'll be too shy to ask for anything!

Successful adjustment to the new culture is essential but there is no one way of achieving this. Providing a comfortable and welcoming home will go some way to easing culture shock. Indeed, students are as likely to encounter the same feelings when they return to their own country after a long period of time abroad. Do not be surprised if a long stay student feels anxious about returning home.

Differences in culture

Differences in culture can also lead to misunderstandings for Homestay providers as well as their students. We can feel offended when things are said in the wrong way. We expect our guests to use 'please' and 'thank you' as we do. The way we use these social skills may seem like common politeness but different cultures express social skills in very different ways.

In many cultures requests are expressed much more directly than British people are accustomed to. A student who says "give me the salt" at the dinner table may not be disrespectful, merely unaware of what is polite and impolite language. We also express ourselves through body language and tone of voice which can also vary from culture to culture. Many languages do not have such a wide range of intonation as English so foreign learners can sound gruff and unfriendly when in fact they are not.

The college does provide cultural awareness sessions for International students at the beginning of the autumn term during their EFL lessons.

Hygiene and Health

Hygiene and health differ around the world on many things which we take for granted.

Many cultures prefer a shower to the bath as 'sitting in dirty water' is seen as unhygienic. It may help to give your student a pillow case to put their underwear in before putting in the washing machine.

Friends

Students are expected to ask your permission before inviting friends round to your home. You should make clear at arrival what you expect from them and agree how late in the evening the student's friends can stay.

You are under no obligation to provide accommodation for a student's family. We recommend that visiting family members arrange hotel or bed and breakfast accommodation during their visits.

Insurance

The college strongly recommends that Homestay providers should have household insurance that covers accidental damage done by students. It may be also be worth insuring valuables, in case of breakage. Fair wear and tear should not be charged to students but students are expected to pay for any damage they may have caused through carelessness. In cases of dispute the college will be willing to mediate and should be contacted at an early stage and before the student leaves. It is imperative that you inform your household contents policy insurers that you have a paying guest/student in your home. If your insurance policy does not cover paying guests in your home, you may be jeopardising your cover for damage caused by a third party.

Richard Huish College cannot accept liability for claims, damages or costs. For further information you can contact the Association of British Insurers on 020 7600 3333 or visit their website www.abi.org.uk

Internet

It is very important to be clear about internet usage from the start. Many students will have a PC or laptop and you may allow your student to share your broadband connection if available. It is ultimately your decision as to whether students are allowed to use your internet provision. The student must respect your decision about internet usage.

We do not guarantee internet access in any accommodation but there is access at college (including a wireless network across the whole of the campus) during opening hours.

Keys

Students should be provided with his or her own front door key which they should return at the end of their stay.

It is a good idea to explain any arrangements for household security to the student e.g. what should be locked by the last person leaving or entering the house and if there are any security alarms to be set.

It is the student's responsibility to look after their copy of the key and, if this is lost, the student is expected to pay for a replacement key.

Language

Conversation is an important part of the student's learning process and help and encouragement are essential. Remember that students are here to improve their English so patience and understanding will be appreciated. When talking with your student, the main thing to remember is to speak slowly, simply and clearly. Students of the same nationality residing in one property should be encouraged to talk English at all times. This will provide the student with opportunities to practise their English.

Laundry

You should provide the student with clean bed linen and clean hand and bath towels every week. It is also expected that you take care of a reasonable amount of the student's personal laundry each week and no extra charge should be made to the student. It may be convenient for you to wash the student's clothes with the family wash or the student may prefer to do his/her own washing, in which case, please show them how to use the washing machine, drying and ironing facilities.

Leisure time

Students will probably enjoy accompanying the family on outings. Students will also appreciate the chance to meet English people on social occasions and receive advice about local places of interest, activities and sports facilities.

Students will also be encouraged to access the college facilities and enrichment activities available which they will be made aware of throughout their time at college.

Meals

The evening meal should always be a substantial dinner including meat, chicken, fish or cheese. Students will expect to have the same meals as your household and to eat with them. If a student has particular dietary needs or allergies the college should have been informed and this will be discussed with the potential Homestay provider. It is also advisable to discuss with your student about the foods they like and dislike when they first arrive. We will endeavour to match the dietary needs of the student with those of the host e.g. placing a vegetarian student with a vegetarian host.

Mealtimes are an excellent opportunity for students to communicate and socialise with the members of the household and students and Homestay providers are therefore expected to eat the majority of their meals together. Ask your student to let you know if he/she intends to miss a meal or be late. Your student may also offer to share their culture by preparing a meal for your family on occasion.

Definitions of accommodation provided are:

Full Board - You will provide breakfast, lunch and an evening meal 7 days a week.

Half Board - You will provide breakfast and an evening meal 7 days a week. Students would have to provide their own lunch.

Self Catering – the students will have to cook for themselves. Please provide space in the fridge and freezer as well as the cupboards in the kitchen for them to keep their food. Students are expected to tidy up after themselves in the kitchen.

If the student wants to eat large quantities of extra food e.g. biscuits or other snacks we would expect them to buy this for themselves and suitable storage should be made available for this.

Medical Treatment

You should let us know if your student is ill as we may need to inform the student's family. Students whose course of study is for 6 months or more will qualify for NHS medical treatment on the same basis as anyone who is ordinarily resident in the UK. Direct him/her to the college for advice on medical insurance if there are any doubts. All students staying in the UK for longer than six months should register with a doctor on arrival - we would appreciate your assistance with this, but if you are unable to help your student register with a Doctor, please inform the college so that we can make the necessary arrangements.

Your family doctor may be able to take new patients or you can ask the college or your local chemist for a list of doctors. If any medicine is prescribed, make sure dosage instructions are understood and the medicine is kept in a safe place. If a student needs a dentist, it is usual to send him/her to the dentist used by your household, but you should tell him/her that he/she will be expected to pay for treatment, and that he/she should establish the cost and extent of treatment in advance.

There may be occasions when you need to administer some first aid or provide your student with some non-prescription medication. Please always remember to ask if they are allergic to anything. Ensure that medication is kept in a cupboard, in its original packaging, with any instructions or information that came with the medication.

Money

Long stay students should open an account with a bank or building society; the college will provide the necessary reference for this. Students are strongly advised not to keep large sums of money in their rooms.

Payment and Charges

The payment contract is between the student and their Homestay provider. Upon request the college will forward weekly direct debit payments to the Homestay provider which is paid by the student's family. Currently fees are between £85.00 and £110.00 per week depending on the type of accommodation offered. (Please refer to our 'Meals' section for further information e.g Full board - £110.00 per week)

To avoid any misunderstandings, the college will provide you with an 'expectation agreement form' that outlines the costs and notice requirements which need to be signed by yourself, the student and/or their parents. This information will be taken from your registration form.

If you are being paid directly by the student, it is best to have a regular payment day with any extra charges carefully itemised (e.g. use of telephone). There should be no extra charges for laundry or heating unless this has been agreed with the college. We expect students to make weekly payments in advance and advise the Homestay provider keeps a duplicate receipt book to record payments made and give the student a receipt for payments made.

If a student falls behind with payment immediately contact the college for advice.

Students who wish to go away for several days (either at the weekend or during the week) or overnight and leave their belongings in the Homestay property are still expected to pay a full (7-day) week's rent unless agreed otherwise with their Homestay providers.

DEPOSIT: Richard Huish College requires a £100.00 deposit from all students which will be refundable to them at the end of their programme and as long as the student has paid his/her fees to date and nothing has been damaged.

Consult the college if there is any question of the student leaving before the arranged time. Two week's notice on either side is a good general rule, or two week's money to be paid in lieu of notice unless there are special circumstances or if you have indicated differently on your registration form.

If the student gives notice, immediately inform the college.

Rebates and Retainers

If the student wants to retain his/her room during college holidays (e.g. half term and major holidays), leaving his/her belongings there so that you cannot let it, it is up to you as to whether you want to charge a retainer fee. Please contact the college for advice if you are unsure about this. The current retention fee payable is £30.00 per week.

Students are expected go home at the major holidays (Christmas, Easter and Summer). If a student wishes to stay during one of these, they are expected to liaise with their Homestay provider to see if accommodation is available.

The college is unable to guarantee alternative accommodation during these holidays.

Religion

Although not all members of a religion are equally dedicated in practice, for some religion is not merely a code of conduct, but it dictates their way of life. Students' beliefs should be respected and received with an open mind. Religion can also provide security for some in an alien environment. Richard Huish College may be able to help students contact local community groups if they wish to practise their religion.

Safety

It is important that students living with you are aware of the risks of fire and any other hazards in your home. You should point out to them the means of escape and the actions to take in the event of a fire etc. Do explain to students any special safety rules and if you have small children make sure that the student is aware of the need to keep hazardous items out of reach, and the importance of stair gates etc. Use of electrical equipment and any room heaters, water heaters, etc. should be explained carefully, as should fire precautions. We also recommend the installation of smoke alarms if you do not already have them. A minimum of one per storey and that a fire blanket is available in all kitchen/cooking areas.

The Gas Safety Regulations 1998 state that it is your responsibility to ensure that all gas appliances are completely safe. By law landlords are generally responsible for making sure gas fittings and flues are maintained in good order, and gas appliances and flues are checked for safety once in a period of 12 months. These records must be kept for at least two years and issue copies of current certificates to existing tenants before they move in. This involves obtaining a Gas Safety Certificate through inspection by an installer who is on the Gas Safe Register www.gassaferegister.co.uk.

You will be asked to provide evidence of gas safety for any gas appliances or installations in the home. This could be a copy of your annual gas service record or a record of the safety check. Please send this to the Business and Professional Development Office as soon as it has been issued. Failure to do so may mean you are breaking the law. For further information call the Health and Safety Executive Gas Safety Advice Line (0800 300 363) or visit www.hse.gov.uk

Smoking

Please make sure students are informed whether they are allowed to smoke on the premises.

Tax and Benefits

Before agreeing to become a Homestay provider, potential hosts are strongly recommended to check with the Department of Work and Pensions and/or HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) to see how taking a student in may affect their entitlement to any benefits and/or tax credits they may receive.

Income is taxable. You should therefore keep a record of income and expenses incurred in connection with each student. As you can set not only the cost of food and heating but also a share of general household expenses such as insurance, rates etc. against this income you may find that very little tax will be payable. Under recent legislation gross annual income from letting furnished accommodation which does not exceed £4,250 is exempt from income tax. Those who receive gross annual rents in excess of £4,250 can choose between:

- Paying tax on the amount by which their gross rents exceed £4,250 without any separate tax relief for allowable expenses, or
- Calculating their profit from letting (gross rents less actual expenses) and paying tax on that profit in the normal way.

We are legally required by the Department of Work and Pensions and the HMRC to supply details of payments made to hosts on request.

You may be eligible for a reduction in council tax if the student is attending college full-time and you are a single person household before accommodating the student. It is your responsibility to inform the local authority of any change in residence that may affect liability or the amount of the bill and you could be charged a penalty if you fail to do so. The college can provide on request a Council Tax certificate showing that the student who resides in your property is a full time student. Please contact Taunton Deane to find out more.

Telephone

Students must be able to receive incoming phone calls as it is important that the college and members of their family can contact them. We recommend though that you do not allow students to make outgoing calls unless you have a firm agreement with them in advance about charges. Use of the telephone by students is a common cause of

misunderstanding.

We advise that the students use their mobile phone for any calls. However, if the student does not have a mobile phone, please talk to him/her about what whether they can or can't use your land-line and under what circumstances. It is therefore worth taking the time to explain your rules and when the cheap rate applies. Students should always ask before using your private phone. Sometimes students have no idea of how expensive it is and they may be used to free local calls at home.

Richard Huish College cannot be held responsible for calls made by students.

Transfer of Students

Not all Homestay matchings of student and Homestay provider work, although the Business and Professional Development Office tries to ensure compatibility. There may be many different reasons and a student's request for transfer should not be taken personally. We will do our best to support you and the student if any disagreement arises resulting in the student needing to move to a new Homestay provider.

Transport

We do not expect you to drive your student everywhere but instead we expect that they walk, cycle or use public transport where possible. We would ask that you help your student to find the quickest and cheapest routes to and from the college and town. Further information can be obtained from the college.

On the first day it would be useful for students to know where the college is, where to catch their bus, how long the journey will take, how the system works, how and where to buy a ticket, the approximate cost and the need for small change. Please contact the college if you require assistance with this.

General Welfare

Under the Education Act 2002 and the Children's Act 2004, the college has special responsibilities to students under 18 years of age and older students if they are considered vulnerable, to safeguard and promote their welfare at all times, including time spent out of college and away from lodgings. As you are caring for our students, this responsibility is also yours and therefore we ask you to always report anything of concern.

Close liaison with the college avoids many problems. Most students' stays are happy and uncomplicated, but from time to time problems may arise.

You should consider what time you would like to set as a curfew and agree this with your student on arrival. Students should always tell you if they are going away for a night or a weekend; if you are worried about your student you should contact the college. If the whole household is going to be absent for any substantial period of time you should inform the college to make any necessary arrangements.

If your student wishes to go away at a weekend or overnight it is essential for you to know where they are with a contact telephone number and address. It is the student's responsibility to provide you with accurate information. If you are in any doubt about the suitability of the arrangement please tell us so that we can make enquiries and gain parental permission if necessary.

If you are planning to go away overnight, please tell us. In the case of students who are under 18 years of age, an adult who has a CRB certificate must be on the premises overnight. If this is not possible, it will be necessary for us to find temporary accommodation for your student.

If your student is over 18 and happy with the arrangement the student can be left alone for a night or two. It is important that you let us know when you are going away, and how we can contact you in an emergency and what arrangements have been made for the student e.g. in respect of food etc.

Do not hesitate to contact the college if you feel the student is excessively homesick, not adjusting to life in Britain, or suffering from any illness or stress. These are often more evident when the student is alone and away from the college

environment.

If you take students from more than one college you should let the Business and Professional Development Office know. The college should also be informed of any change of circumstances (e.g. marital status, children or pets).

Please contact the college if you have any problems with students. If a medical emergency arises, contact the emergency services or your doctor before you contact the college as they will be of greater assistance.

The college emergency number to call is 07817 089 014. Please remember that this number is for emergencies only.

We will not tolerate the miss-use of alcohol or drugs, if you are aware of your student doing so, please contact the college immediately. The student's parents will be informed.

Student Services

We have a support network for students and a team of qualified college Counsellors who students can contact confidentially. If you require any further information on this, please see our website www.huish.ac.uk or contact the college.

Data Protection

Richard Huish College is registered with the UK Information Commissioner under the 1998 Data Protection Act (UK). For the purposes of managing the Homestay accommodation service we will hold information about you in paper and electronic format. We will only share this information with UK statutory organisations, including the UK Border Agency, our education agents, banks and medical services and will not share it with any other party.

You are required to consent to the college processing your information, but if you do not consent then we will be unable to manage an appropriate Homestay accommodation service and your services will not be utilised. You have the right to request to view your personal information for a small fee.

Feedback

Finally, we will contact all Homestay providers once a term to check that everything is okay. We welcome feedback, so if you have any questions, or would like to talk to a member of the team, please contact us.

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