







UUK/GuildHE

Approved Code of
Practice for the
Management of Student
Housing

15th Annual Report

September 2021



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1. Foreword - Chair of Governance Board

It seems unlikely that anyone will forget the year 2020/21 and how radically our lives changed because of Covid 19. It was a year when the whole nature of the student experience was turned on its head and new ways of educating and supporting students had to be developed and embraced at alarming speed. One can only imagine how strange it must have been for colleagues to manage and operate student residential accommodation with no, or very few, occupants. Of course, some buildings were "mothballed" but there were still many processes that had to be adhered to and tasks that had to carried out to ensure that the assets were protected and would be Code compliant and in a fit and safe condition when students could return.

An example of this is detailed in Section 5 of this Annual Report, the 15th such report, which relates to the audit process. Despite the difficulties under which colleagues were operating 25 audits were satisfactorily completed as well as a further 10 from the previous year which had been deferred because of the initial impact of Covid. It is also worthy of note that the average mandatory recommendations per audit figure is the lowest it has been in the last 6 years. However less satisfactory is the number of audit recommendations relating to standards of fire safety. The table on page 8 shows these and that specifically 10 recommendations relate to Fire Risk Assessments. During the year we will consider how best to improve in this area.

The figures relating to training are also very pleasing, both the take up of the online courses and the increase in numbers attending the Joint Codes Conference and the Practitioners Conference, enabled by online participation.

It will be interesting to see how our plans for 2021/22 come to fruition.

Throughout the year I have been extremely grateful to several people who have worked so hard and diligently to ensure that the Code continued to deliver for its members. Particularly to Claire Furnivall, the Code Administrator who does so much of the unsung work so efficiently. I also wish to thank my colleagues on the Governance Board who have been so supportive and so understanding of my attempts to remotely chair meetings; the members of the Sector Advisory Group who make sure that the Code remains relevant and practical; and colleagues at UUK for their support and wise counsel. I would especially like to record my thanks to Mike Ball who stood down after several years chairing the SAG and to Sam Roseveare our UUK representative who moved to pastures new during the year. I am pleased to report that Mike has been replaced by Helen McGlashan and I look forward to working with Helen as we progress the Code.

I commend this Report to you and in doing so wish to register my thanks to everyone who works in the sector and under the requirements of the Code. I very much hope that life will become much easier for colleagues before our 16th Annual Report is due.

Andrew Nightingale Independent Chair of the UUK AcoP Governance Board October 2021

2. Executive Summary

This Annual Report covers the period September 2020 to August 2021.

This fifteenth annual report presents a record of the significant achievements made by the administration and governance of the Code and more importantly the positive impact it has had on improving the management arrangements for the benefit of the 272,025 students who are residents of the members' establishments. During this period, the Code operated within its set parameters and met all its statutory requirements. The Governance Board (GB) and Sector Advisory Group (SAG) met regularly, in accordance with the published annual cycle of meetings, to discharge their respective responsibilities.

Membership remains strong. 145 institutions are registered with the Code which encompasses 4,549 buildings and 272,025 bed spaces, an increase of 10,872 (4.2%) bed spaces on September 2020.

Membership lists for the Code can be found on the website:

https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/topics/students/student-support/accommodation-codepractice

Detailed building information can also be found on the student facing website: https://www.thesac.org.uk/

Calls for audits, complaints and building information data were issued in accordance with the Code requirements, and the details of returns received from members are covered in this report.

Deadlines for the return of information to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government have been met.

The financial activities of the Code administration have been duly scrutinised by both SAG and GB and the year-end accounts have been independently audited. Key activities for 2020/21 were adversely impacted by COVID-19, but key activities delivered included:

- The eleventh annual conference in partnership with the Accreditation Network UK (ANUK) Code,
- The sixth annual practitioners conference was delivered to a record number of delegates,
- New Late Building guidance has been developed to assist Institutions who are undertaking new build or refurbishment of existing student accommodation stock,
- A Mergers Policy has been developed to aid Institutions that experience a merger or take-over,
- Launch of new Code promotional materials which Institutions can use for promotion
 of the Code with their students. These materials, which include logos, posters, email
 signatures, social media banners, stickers, and leaflets have been recently updated
 to include new branding in both English and Welsh Languages. All members received

- a free sticker for every registered bedroom and a poster for general display. This activity proved beneficial promoting the updated materials.
- Twenty five audits due this year and an additional ten that received extensions due to COVID in 2020 were successfully undertaken.
- The continued development of the online UUK Code Management tool.

3. Governance

i. Meetings

The Governance Board oversees the strategic direction and operation of the Code. It met twice, virtually during this reporting period, October 2020 and March 2021.

The Sector Advisory Group's aims and objectives are to monitor the Code's key operational processes, oversee and support membership compliance, and recommend any changes or improvements to Code content or management processes. During this reporting period the SAG met virtually on three occasions: November 2020, February 2021 and June 2021.

In recognition of the need to demonstrate an open and transparent approach to decision making, a Register of Members' Interests was compiled in 2014. This has been updated as GB and SAG membership has changed. Declarations of Interest are noted at the beginning of each meeting and recorded on an annual basis.

ii. Changes in legislation since the last report

During the Covid 19 pandemic, changes in the law were introduced to protect the NHS and reduce the spread of the virus. The mitigations introduced included social distancing and work from home measures which resulted in changes to audit methods and members were required to introduce practical and reasonable processes to deliver the Code in a manner that kept both staff and students safe.

iii. Changes to the Code since the last report.

There have been no changes to the Code this year. The Late Building Guidance and Mergers Policy were circulated to members in July 2021 and will be formally adopted as part of the next formal Code review.

4. Membership of the Code

145 institutions are registered with the Code (135 in England, 9 in Wales and 1 in Northern Ireland).

Establishments wishing to sign up to the Code are required to submit a letter from the vice-chancellor or principal formally stating that intention and undertaking to adhere by the provisions of the Code. A list of all buildings to be included in the Code is required and establishments seeking membership are also required to supply an audit report. Verification of eligibility and compliance is the responsibility of the Governance Board, advised by the SAG. There were no new members joining the Code during the period covered by this report.

From the 31st July 2021 the University of Bedfordshire resigned from the code due to outsourcing the ownership of its student accommodation.

5. Audits

i. Procedure

It is a requirement of the Code that an establishment's internal audit procedures must include an assessment of how well the management of student accommodation satisfies the provisions of the Code. This year there were 25 audits due to be undertaken against the Code. The administrator has liaised closely with all respective code members and received satisfactory audit returns from all 25 establishments.

The administrator received a further 10 audits from institutions who had been granted an extension to their audit submission for 2019/20 because of the impact of Covid 19.

All received audit returns were scrutinised by the SAG at its June 2021 meeting.

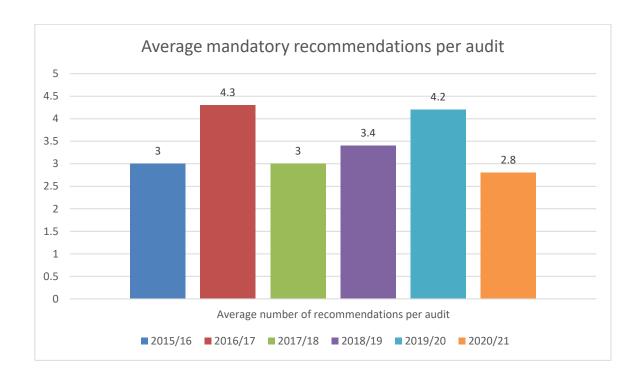
ii. Findings

During 2020/21, 13 institutions were fully compliant with all mandatory elements of the Code and thus received no mandatory audit recommendations. The table below outlines the number of recommendations concerning mandatory elements of the Code from the 35 audit reports received and provides a comparison with the numbers received in each of the previous five years.

The data indicates an decrease in the number of mandatory elements that are identified during the audit process as needing to be addressed.

iii. Average mandatory recommendations per audit over previous 5 years:

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Average number of recommendations per audit	3	4.3	3	3.4	4.2	2.8
Total Recommendations	103	242	70	108	171	98
Number of Audits	34	56	23	32	41	35



All the recommendations rated as high risk have been reviewed by the SAG with regards to the nature of the risk involved, including an assessment of the management response and the timescale for remedial measures.

- As of 27th September 2021, there were a total of 19 outstanding mandatory recommendations across 8 institutions that require follow up action and subsequent confirmation that the agreed management action has taken place.
- The Administrator is seeking confirmation that these actions have been implemented from the institutions concerned, and any exceptions will be reported at the Governance Board meeting in October 2021 following which any relevant action will be implemented.

iv. Specific compliance

The sections of the Code receiving the most recommendations were:

Code Ref	Code Section	Section Compliance	Audit Recomm- endations
2.5	Fire Risk Assessment	All H/FEE's should have a formal policy that ensures that a suitable and sufficient Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) is conducted by a competent person for all residential accommodation covered by the Code. The FRA and significant outcomes must be recorded in a formal report. Copies of the FRA should be made available to external agencies	10
2.18	Portable Appliance Testing (PAT)	All portable appliances supplied by an H/FEE, or used in the premises by H/FEE staff, must be inspected and maintained in accordance with an establishment's PAT policy. Where arrangements exist for the testing of students' personal electrical equipment these should be set down in the PAT policy. The H/FEE must make students aware of the PAT policy, and any procedure for having students' personal electrical equipment tested.	5
2.22	Water Hygiene	Hot and cold-water services must be installed, monitored, and maintained in accordance with The Health &Safety Executive and statutory public health requirements including Legionella testing.	5
2.8.2	Evacuation Routes (Means of Escape)	In order to ensure safe and effective evacuation from residential accommodation in the event of a fire or other emergency, the designated Evacuation Route must be maintained in a safe and accessible condition at all times – including corridors, landings, stairs (inc. stairwells) and hallways. The maintenance and servicing of specific equipment and building infrastructure within the Evacuation Routes must be carried out in accordance with relevant British Standards and the FRA, including: Fire safety notices and evacuation signs	5
2.26	Staff	All members of staff (including contractors) must be badged whilst on the premises. There must be a record kept of staff accessing bedrooms in the absence of the student.	5

The mandatory element most failed last year was Section 2.5 of the Code, which requires that all H/FEE's should have a formal policy that ensures that a suitable and sufficient Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) is conducted by a competent person for all residential accommodation covered by the Code. The FRA and significant outcomes must be recorded in a formal report. Copies of the FRA should be made available to external agencies.

The graphics below shows a breakdown of the total number of mandatory recommendations identified under each section of the Code.



Repairs & Maintenance Management



Anti-Social Behaviour & Disciplinary Procedures



Landlord Tenant Relationship



Health & Safety Standards & Procedures



General



Health & Wellbeing



Environmental Quality

6. Complaints

146 institutions were invited to return information on complaints/non-complaints from which we received a 100% return.

130 institutions returned no complaints in respect of code compliance issues. Of the remaining 16 institutions a total of 18 complaints were recorded, of which only 2 complaints now remain open.

The number of complaints will be significantly lower this year due to updated guidance issued by the OIA on the handling of complaints arising from Coronavirus. It acknowledges the providers may wish to depart from their usual processes to resolve issues in a quick, efficient, and consistent way by allowing students to complain formally without requiring them to resolve the matter locally and issue a Completion of Procedures letter once the complaint has been answered without a final internal review stage.

These complaint areas are reviewed by the SAG and GB to see if there is a pattern which might indicate a requirement for further modification of the Code; clarification of the Code wording; or if the matter informs a topic for further training.

7. Financial information

- i. The 2019/2020 accounts were audited by Hawsons Chartered Accountants and presented to the Governance Board in October 2020. The accounts highlighted an inyear income of £107,547 and expenditure of £77,598 leaving a surplus in operation for the year of £30,009. A surplus of £6,585 had been budgeted for after a proposed bed space fee increase was implemented. The significant increase of in year surplus was due to the cancelled in person meetings and conferences due to the COVID-19 pandemic which led to a considerable reduction in expenditure. The accounts recorded no in year debt.
- ii. The carried forward reserve balance for year ending 31 July 2020 was £115,076, which is £9,000 above the tolerance level for maximum budget reserves, which state a maximum for the end of year net assets should be in the region of £85,000, with a 25% tolerance level above this to enable effective planning for larger projects. The increase in surplus was unavoidable with the onset of national lockdowns and the ability to travel and meet in person being prohibited.
- **iii.** The in-year accounts for 2020/2021 reveal a healthy balance and no historic or in-year debt for membership fees. The year-end accounts (31 July 2021) have been audited by Hawsons Chartered Accountants and are due to be reported to Governance Board for approval at its October 2021 meeting.

8. Membership meetings

i. 11th Joint National Codes Conference

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the 11^{th} National Codes Conference was held virtually over 2 dates- 6^{th} and 13^{th} November 2020 and attracted registrations from 158 delegates, the largest attendances in the history of the event.

Due to Covid-19, in the best interests of members it has been decided that the 12th Joint National Codes Conference will be a hybrid event, the in-person element will be held at The British Library on Fridays 12th November, with the sessions both live streamed for those attending virtually, the session will be accessible to all post events.

ii. 6th UUK/Guild HE Accommodation Code Members Practitioners' Conference

Due to COVID 19 restrictions and mitigation uncertainty, the 6th Practitioners' Conference was held over two days on 30th June and 1st July as a free online event. The event attracted registrations from 160 delegates from 91 separate UUK Code member institutions, the largest attendance in the history of the event.

The programme was focused on supporting members with the challenges faced due to COVID-19. Sessions included a discussion on acceptable remote audit processes, managing teams remotely, virtual disciplinary meetings, Code update, effective student communication methods and a panel debate on lessons learnt.

9. Engagement

Information about the UUK Code and its registered buildings are contained on 2 separate websites:

- a dedicated student facing website www.thesac.org.uk
- web pages within the UUK website contain member and auditor information http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Pages/accommodation-code-of-practice.aspx

The web traffic report for the student facing website www.thesac.org.uk revealed that the site had 46,724 users during the period August 2020 – July 2021, up an incredible 43% on same period the previous year. The highest usage occurred on Monday February 1st 2021 with 1,237 users accessing the site. This data is unexplainable but may be linked to COVID announcements affecting UK or international students.

The number of visitors from the top 5 countries all increased, however the largest percentage growth in traffic was seen from China and The Netherlands.

There was an increase in the website traffic originating from devises in the top 9 visits by country compared to 2019/20. There was a decrease in traffic from Japan, Germany, Spain, and Italy, all seeing a reduction of visits for the 2nd year in a row.

 Website analytics by location for the student fronting Code website www.thesac.org.uk

	2018/19 Users	2019/20 Users	2020/21 Users	Inc / Dec on previous year
UK	19785	21813	25402	3589
USA	3495	1645	1895	250
China	1070	1461	2546	1085
India	762	1177	1878	701
Netherlands	130	905	1911	1006
Finland	27	842	1766	924
France	463	717	1163	446
Hong Kong	375	496	823	327
Austria	48	471	927	456
Spain	451	445	393	-52

10. Activities 2020/21

- A review of the bed space charge took place during the year by the SAG. A
 sequential fee increase had previously been agreed for 2021/22, however the SAG
 recommended postponing the increase for 1 year and retain fees at the current
 level. The Governance Board approved the proposal in March 2021.
- The membership and buildings lists were updated and submitted to the MHCLG. The UUK and student facing websites were also updated.
- Complaints returns were analysed and reported to SAG in June 2021.
- 25 scheduled audit returns plus an additional 10 delayed audit returns from 2019/20 were analysed and reported to SAG in June 2021.
- The 11th Annual Joint Codes Conference was held virtually over 2 dates in November 2020 (see Section 8i).
- The 6th annual Practitioners' Conference was held virtually over 2 dates (see Section 8ii).
- The on-line Induction and Training tool is in place to support member institutions with 1773 active learners registered. They have started 7573 course modules of which 7302 have been successfully completed.
- The UUK review of the Code to assess its ongoing placement within UUK / ownership and the procurement of future administrative support has been delayed due to Coronavirus.
- The online management tool for all UUK Code members has continued to be developed to automate action reminder emails and improve the management information reporting.
- New Late Building guidance has been developed and introduced.
- A Mergers Policy has been developed to aid Institutions that experience a merger or take-over.
- Development of updated Code promotional materials, including logos, posters, email signatures, social media banners, stickers, and leaflets. All have been provided in both English and Welsh Languages.
- Launch of new materials all members were sent a free sticker for every registered bedroom and a poster for general display.

- The SAG underwent a pulse survey to understand the scope of late building issues for UUK Code members, the results did not suggest there was a significant problem to commission a piece of research.
- UUK Code E-Learning tool modules were updated to align with new Code.

11. Plans for 2021/22

- Adopt the recommendations of the UUK review as appropriate and subsequently procure an administration service.
- The 12th Joint Codes Conference will be held in November 2021 in partnership with ANUK at The British Library, the event will be a hybrid event to ensure that all member requirements are met.
- Members will be asked to update their buildings list and the information will be submitted to the MHCLG in spring 2022.
- Complaints returns will be analysed and reported to SAG in June 2022.
- 32 scheduled audit returns will be analysed and reported to SAG in June 2022.
- Following the success of the 6th Practitioners' Conference in July 2021, the 7th conference is scheduled to be held in Manchester in July 2022.
- Delivery of the UUK Code management tool phase 3 development to members, including automatic email reminders for matters relating to audits, findings, complaints and building lists.
- Identify new Chair for GB and Chair designate for the SAG.
- SAG to undergo a more generic piece of research on the Code.

For more information on:

- The Code
- Terms of reference
- List of members
- Registered buildings

Please visit

www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Pages/accommodation-code-of-practice.aspx

www.thesac.org.uk

APPENDIX A

GOVERNANCE BOARD TO THE UNIVERSITIES UK/GuildHE ACOP FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF STUDENT HOUSING

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APPENDIX B

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