

A photograph of three people—a man with glasses and a patterned sweater, a young woman in a black Nike shirt, and an older woman in a yellow cardigan—smiling and interacting with a small white dog on a white rug. The background shows a wooden chair and a metal trash can.

Warm Welcome Host Handbook

WELCOME TO WARM WELCOME!

Homestay is about providing a home, not just a room. Feeling at home is important if a student is to thrive. It's a significant part of the total experience of living and studying in Britain. Many of the schools we work with regard homestay as one of the best ways to help students adapt to British life and improve their English speaking skills.

This handbook has been designed to provide information and guidance to help you understand your role as a host, and to help you manage and enjoy your hosting experience.

We hope that the information contained in this handbook will answer the majority of your questions but we realise that it is impossible to predict every situation that may arise so we encourage you to contact us if you need any help or advice.

Save our numbers in your phone: 0121 333 4567 (9am to 6pm Monday to Friday) or 07749 741 490 (out of office hours)

Our team will always be happy to offer the help and advice you need.

CONTENTS

	Pg.
1 Who Are We?	4
2 Your Role As a Host	6
3 In Your Home	12
4 Student Health and General Welfare	19
5 Change of Homestay Details	20
6 Top Tips for Successful Hosting	24

1. WHO ARE WE?

Warm Welcome Homestay Limited provides quality homestay accommodation to visiting international students, interns and professionals.

Our HQ is based in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter so we are well positioned to provide an outstanding service to all our students and, you, their homestay host. We will support you throughout your journey from day one when your student arrives, right through until your students' departure.

We are only a telephone call away – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for any help and guidance you may need.

1.2 What is a Homestay?

Homestay is a living arrangement where families, couples, working professionals, retired or single people offer a student a private room in their home for a short period of time. This is typically from one week to three months. Some students choose to stay for longer, up to a year in some instances. Long-stay students are usually completing a degree, studying an intense English language course or on a career-boosting internship programme.

Homestay accommodation is generally requested by English language schools and universities, who offer their international students a package of English language lessons and homestay accommodation. It is hoped that this arrangement will help students to improve their English speaking skills. Plus, it's a great way for students to experience family life and British culture first hand.

1.3 Why is a Homestay Such a Popular Choice for Language Students?

There are many different options available to international students when they choose to study in the UK. These include homestay, halls of residence, student house shares, hotels or hostels. International students who choose to live with a host over other options want to fit into a home away from home environment. Here they have the opportunity to live within a typical British home, experience our culture and have further opportunities to practise their English speaking skills.

Many schools will arrange excursions or activities for students on weekends, so hosts are not expected to do this. However, it is still a good idea to include your student in as many aspects of family life as possible, if the student is willing of course.

2. YOUR ROLE AS A HOST

2.1 The Benefits to You As a Host

There are many benefits associated with hosting international students compared to having a private tenant rent your spare room:

- By hosting an international student, you and your family will develop new friendships. Our students often keep in touch with their hosts after their experience and many invite their hosts over to their own countries to repay the hospitality they received.
- Children can benefit too. It's like having an older brother or sister to them sometimes and they definitely enjoy having international Facebook friends. Hosting foreign students really opens your eyes to the world and allows you to develop a deeper understanding of other cultures besides your own.
- As well as meeting students from all over the world, you'll also benefit from a dedicated team available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to offer support and advice should any issues arise.
- Payments are made 7 working days after the student's arrival via bank transfer and paid each week thereafter so you'll not be left waiting for payment like sometimes happens with a private tenant. Plus, you'll also benefit from the security of being introduced to an international student by a reliable and reputable provider, rather than having to host an unknown private lodger or tenant.

And finally, you have the flexibility of choosing short or long-term students to suit you and your family's needs.

2.2 Welcoming Your Student

Please make sure there is someone at home to welcome your student. This is essential for obvious reasons but also it's important to remember that for most, it is their first time in the UK, and many things will be new and bewildering for them. A warm welcome is just what they need.

Most students will arrive during the weekend but sometimes they may arrive during the week. We make it clear to them at the time of booking that most hosts will not be available to welcome them until after 7pm as most hosts are out at work during the day.

You are not expected to meet them at the airport. We or their school will provide a transfer service to your home at a pre-agreed time.

2.3 Tour of the House

Depending on the time of your student's arrival, they may want to rest, especially if it's late. We suggest that you initially give a quick tour of their bedroom and bathroom facilities at this time. A tour of the home can be done the next day. This may include how to use electrical appliances and equipment, and where to find things they may use. By doing this, you are showing your student how to be an active member of the family.

2.4 Communication

It's a good idea to explain the basic things a student needs to know early on in order to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding further down the line.

Let your student know about house rules, your routines and schedule as you tour the house so that they know what your expectations are from the very outset.



Birmingham canals



2.5 Setting House Rules

Here are some helpful suggestions for areas to cover when setting your house rules:

- Telephone use for incoming and outgoing calls
- Internet usage
- Times for breakfast and evening meals
- Whether food is allowed in the student's room
- Times for using the bathroom/shower
- Keeping the bathroom tidy
- What kitchen equipment can or can't be used
- Whether visitors are welcome and until what time
- What to do when a student expects to be home late
- Where smoking is/isn't permitted
- Noise levels at particular times of day and night

Please note that these are only suggestions, you do not have to cover all of them. You need to think about what is best for your family and your home.

2.6 Speak English at Home

It is a requirement that the host or host's spouse be fluent in English and English be used as the primary medium of communication. That is, after all, what visiting students need and enjoy.

2.7 Language and Culture

Please be tolerant of language problems. Sometimes a student may sound rather rude or abrupt because they haven't mastered the polite forms of English. In their culture it is not impolite. So please don't take offence. Students are often surprised to find out that a 'please' and a 'thank you' go such a long way in British culture.

It is also useful to understand that body language and tone of voice can vary from culture to culture, so it is possible for hosts and students to misunderstand each other.

2.8 English Language Ability

Not all your students will be at the same level of English. This is due to the different levels of education and the diverse backgrounds of students from around the world.

2.9 Helping Your Student With Their English

You are not expected to teach English to your students but it is very helpful to encourage conversation with them so that they develop confidence in communication. A little bit of correction when students are making glaring mistakes is helpful but there is no need to overdo it.

3. IN YOUR HOME

3.1 Your Student's Bedroom

The room should contain a full-size bed, wardrobe or fitted cupboard, chest of drawers or dressing table, a mirror, desk or table with table-lamp and chair. It is especially important that students have a desk or table, as they will often want to study in the evenings. Please note wireless internet is essential, and no more than 2 students should share a room.

3.2 Heating

Adequate heating should be provided – please bear in mind that many students are used to warmer climates or better insulated homes than ours - and some extra bedding might need to be offered. If you turn off your heating overnight in the winter, it is important to tell students about this in advance. Students are made aware of the expensive energy costs in the UK but some students find it difficult to believe.

3.3 Cleaning

Students should understand that they are responsible for making their beds and tidying their rooms. But, as the host it's down to you to provide clean bed linen and towels each week during your student's stay.

3.4 Bathroom & Toilet

Your student should have free access to the bathroom in the same way as the rest of the household. A rota system may be necessary. Ask the student to make sure the bathroom is left clean and tidy after use, and ensure that they know how to use all the facilities.

3.5 Laundry

Please show your student how to use the washing machine and where to dry and iron their clothes. Two washes per week is all we ask – one for light coloured laundry and one for dark coloured laundry. It's a good idea to supervise them the first time they do it.



Victoria Square, Birmingham City Centre

3.6 Meals

It depends on the type of Meal Plan the student has opted for. There are three options:

- Self-catering

With this option, the student is allocated cupboard and fridge space and is allowed to use the facilities in your kitchen to make their own meals in their own time with their own food.

- Bed and breakfast

For breakfast we recommend offering a continental style 'help yourself' breakfast: fruit juice, yogurt or cereal, toast and tea or coffee.

- Half board

With the half board option students are offered breakfast as above plus a two course evening meal consisting of meat or fish with potatoes/rice/pasta and vegetables, hot or cold dessert: yoghurt, cake or fruit and a drink: cold water or fruit juice.

In order to give maximum opportunity for English conversation, it is particularly important that students have their main meal with the host most evenings of the week. Students will expect to have the same meals as your household, and when possible you should eat with them. We will inform you at the time of booking if the student has any special dietary requirements: vegan, vegetarian, halal, non-halal, gluten free etc

Students rarely complain about meals. However, it is clear that they prefer fresh home cooking rather than processed foods.

Students should try to fit in with the mealtimes of the host, although some flexibility is required. On some occasions, it may be possible to adjust the mealtime to suit the student, while on others, for example if a student wishes to stay out some evenings, the host could leave, say, a cold dish in the fridge or a meal that the student could reheat in the oven/microwave. Students are made aware that they should inform you if they wish to miss a meal.

3.7 Telephone & Internet

Most students will have mobile phones and can be expected to use this as their primary means of communication.

It's entirely up to you whether you allow your student to use the telephone. Many hosts allow incoming calls only. However, if a student wishes to use the phone to make international calls we strongly recommend the use of international calling cards. These are available at most local shops, and your student can buy one that has a certain credit limit (e.g. £5, £10, £20)

However, nearly all international students are as tech savvy as their British counterparts and will be experts using the internet and social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Skype meaning an internet connection is essential.

Internet-wise you'll need to give the student the access code and password so they can connect to the Internet. Different Internet packages come with different monthly download limits. Hosts are advised to consult their Internet service provider regarding any download limit on their own account before allowing a student to use the Internet.

Nowadays, though, most students seem to purchase an unlimited data sim card from Three as soon as they arrive so then there is less pressure on your homes wifi.

3.8 Curfew Times

Students over the age of 18 should not be expected to observe a curfew. However, out of courtesy, they should inform you of their whereabouts and the time they are planning to come home, especially if staying out late or overnight.

Warm Welcome's curfew times for students aged 16–17 is 10.30pm, unless otherwise agreed with their school and their parents have signed a parental consent form agreeing to this.



Bullring Shopping Centre Birmingham City Centre

3.9 Key

Students over 18 should be given their own house key for the period of their stay. If the student loses the key, they should be expected to pay for a replacement.

It's at the discretion of the host to determine whether door keys will be given to students aged 16–17.

3.10 Guests

Students may occasionally want to invite a friend or relative to your home but this is not encouraged. They should always ask your permission first if they wish to invite a guest.

3.11 Personal Privacy

There will be times when you yourselves want privacy, and you are entitled to inform the students about this. However, we expect students to be invited to mix with members of your household at other times beside meal times. Please bear in mind that students have chosen accommodation 'in a home' or 'with a family' at least partly in order to practice their English.

We recommend that students should have free access to the living room. Certainly, students will usually want to talk with you and other members of your household as much as possible, so please try to make conversation with them. Friendly chit chat makes for a warm and friendly atmosphere and we thoroughly recommend it.

If your student spends a lot of time in their room, this could be because they need help overcoming the initial awkwardness of being in a strange house. Do encourage them to integrate but do allow them to be alone if they insist.

3.12 Smoking

Please make very clear from the start your policy regarding smoking. If you do not permit smoking in your home, please advise students to do so outside, if indeed that is allowed at your home. Students who are allowed to smoke outside are made aware that they must discard their cigarette butts responsibly and tidily.

3.13 Public Transport

Please show your student where to find the nearest bus stop/train station to the City Centre. This will help them to feel at ease on their first morning journey to school. Students are advised to purchase a travelcard on their smartphones. They can download the NXbus m-ticket app and follow the online instructions. We will be happy to help your students do this so please just ask.

3.14 Dealing with Homesickness & Culture Shock

Initially, your student will be very excited about the new culture. However, as time passes, the reality of cultural differences sets in. Such differences in lifestyle, values, beliefs and interpersonal relationships will at first be disorientating.

At this stage, your student may begin to miss family, friends and places, resulting in homesickness. This can manifest itself in a wide range of behaviour, including withdrawal, confusion, apathy and anxiety. Providing a comfortable and welcoming home environment and offering a kind word of reassurance and encouragement will go a long way to overcoming such culture shock.

Being aware of what your student is going through and helping them to cope with the symptoms are the most effective actions you can take.

Once this negative phase has passed, most students will settle into their new life. These feelings are normal and common and the majority of students will find their way through them perfectly well

3.15 Religious Practices & Beliefs

For many students, their religion is not merely a code of conduct, but dictates their way of life. It should therefore be respected and received with an open mind. Religion can also provide security for students who are facing the initial phases of culture shock.

4. STUDENT HEALTH & GENERAL WELFARE

4.1 GP Services

Any student staying in the UK for longer than six months should register with a doctor on arrival.

If any medicine is prescribed, make certain that the student understands the dosage instructions and that the medicine is kept in a safe place.

Students studying in Britain for less than six months who are not EU nationals (or from a country that has a mutual health agreement with the UK) have to pay for NHS treatment, unless it is emergency treatment or treatment for an infectious disease. The cost of this should normally be covered by the student's medical insurance.

If your student needs a dentist, it's best practice to send them to your local dentist. You should make the student aware that they will be expected to pay for the treatment.

It is important to keep an eye on your student to make sure that their work and health are not suffering in any way, as you would with your own children. This will mean ensuring they have plenty of good food and not too many late nights!

Please note that students aged over 18 should be allowed to stay out late or even spend the night away from home. They should, however, always let you know if they are going to be late for meals or home very late.

If you have any urgent concerns about your student's welfare, you should contact Warm Welcome on the emergency contact number provided on the first page of this handbook and which should already be stored in your phone!

4.2 Attendance at School

Students are expected to attend school each day according to their timetable. They are responsible for getting themselves up and ready each day, although a gentle wakeup-call won't go amiss.

If your student is unwell or likely to be late for some reason, they are expected to telephone their school first thing in the morning.

If they are too unwell to telephone themselves, please contact Warm Welcome or the school on their behalf.

4.3 Bank Accounts

If your student is staying with you short term, then we would advise that you do not allow your student to open up an account with your address. However, for longer-term students, you may wish to consider allowing them to do this. This is entirely up to you and you do not have to do so if you are not comfortable with it.

Please consider, however, that living in Birmingham without a UK bank account may be expensive and is not ideal for the student. In this case the student may ask to be relocated to a homestay where it is possible for them to open a UK bank account.

If you allow a student to open a bank account at your address, we advise that you ensure that the student closes the account before they leave. If you have any concerns regarding issues around student bank accounts, please contact Warm Welcome directly.



The Jewellery Quarter

5. CHANGE OF HOMESTAY DETAILS

If the description of your accommodation changes in any way, please let us know straightaway so that we can update our records. We must provide accurate information to prospective students. Also, if you decide to make another room available, please inform us so that we can arrange a re-visit before any students are placed in the room.

6. Top tips for a successful hosting experience

- Tell your student/guest about your house rules from day one to avoid any misunderstandings further down the line
- Exchange telephone numbers on arrival if they have not already been shared and keep in touch with each other
- Demonstrate how to open/lock doors and windows and show them the exit routes in the event of a fire. Emphasise the importance of security and that doors and windows should always be locked when entering and leaving the home
- Show them the bus routes and if possible, accompany them on the bus the weekend they arrive so that they know how to get to school on Monday morning. You don't have to arrange their buss pass as we or their school will show them how to do that, just make sure they have the right change or use their Contactless debit card or Apple/Google Pay facility on their phones – believe it or not most students will know how to do this!
- Let them know what time you usually have dinner. Make sure they understand that they must call you in advance if they are going to be late or will not be coming home for dinner
- Chat! Your student may feel uncomfortable at first, but talking to your student and finding out about their families, their home life, general likes and dislikes will help them to feel at home. Including them in as many aspects of family life as possible will help them to feel part of your family and will also contribute to a harmonious homestay experience for all

Help and support

Warm Welcome staff are always available to provide advice and support should you need it. Please feel free to contact us at any time with any queries you may have.

We will be happy to help.

We hope you will enjoy your hosting experience!



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Home from home.

GET IN TOUCH



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