HE Update:

Universities UK (UUK)

Accommodation Code of Practice
September 2014

Background

Over 150 Universities and Colleges are signed up to the UUK Accommodation Code of Practice (last updated in 2010), which exempts them from the requirements of the 2004 Housing Act. The Code was designed to ensure that students throughout the UK are provided with accommodation that is both safe and satisfactory for living. The Code requires an audit every three years with a summary of the findings, recommendations and agreed actions provided to the UUK/Guild HE Sector Advisory Group.

The Code itself includes almost one hundred individual requirements, both mandatory and non-mandatory but these requirements can be summarised into six main areas:

- Requirements for a healthy safe environment

- Requirements for timely repairs and maintenance

- Requirements for a clean and pleasant living environment

- The formal contractual relationship between students and the University

- Student access to health and wellbeing services

- Requirements for a living environment free from anti-social behaviour

Importance of the Code to your Institution

On the most basic level, compliance with the Code is a legal requirement.

We believe however, that this area spreads beyond simply compliance with a legal requirement; the standard of University accommodation now forms a vital part of the student experience. Using the Code as a form of effective self-regulation will undoubtedly ensure the continuous improvements of your institution's accommodation standards. In turn, this will obviously mean a higher standard of accommodation for your students, enhancing the experience your institution has to offer.

Universities with accommodation provision are also facing increased competition from private sector providers of student accommodation. Private sector market share of bed spaces for students throughout the UK has increased in the last four years by over 90,000 rooms equating to nearly 40% of market share (www.NUS.org.uk, 2012). It goes without saying that this is a major challenge to the traditional model of student accommodation provided solely through University owned student halls.

One of the best ways for universities to address the challenge is to improve the standards of University owned halls, and so improve the student experience for those residents.

The Code provides a strong platform for this to be achieved, and below we highlight some of the themes arising from Accommodation Code of Practice audits conducted over the previous academic year and some of our best practice guidelines to help your institution achieve full compliance.

Themes arising from ACOP audits completed by Uniac

We have completed Accommodation Code of Practice audits at a number of our member institutions over the past 12 months, and there are clear themes in terms of areas for development across these audits.

Two significant areas of development to meet compliance with the Code relate to fire safety and water hygiene.

The Code contains a number of requirements in terms of fire safety. This ranges from providing information and advice on prevention of fire to students, conducting all the necessary fire safety testing (not just of the fire alarms themselves but all the additional equipment and escape routes) and finally ensuring all the necessary fire safety signage is in place. These requirements, to a varying extent, were areas we identified as current practices needing to be addressed to achieve full compliance.

Similarly with water hygiene, we have encountered a need for further development to meet the requirements of the Code. The inadequacy of monitoring around water tank inspections and record-keeping of the flushing of water outlets in unoccupied rooms has been particularly common.

Other common themes picked up across the audits we have completed included:

- Inadequate arrangements for ensuring students received their deposit back within 28 days of the end of tenancy
- Incomplete or inadequate PAT testing of electrical equipment
- Unsatisfactory maintenance and appearance of common areas including shared bathrooms and laundry facilities
- Lack of student involvement in the review of compliance with the requirements of the Code

Summary – Best Practice

Three main pieces of advice:

- **Keep an internal copy of the Code that is continuously updated:** your Accommodation Office should keep their own internal copy of the Code that is continuously monitored and updated. This will not only make the audit process much smoother as the relevant evidence and documentation will always be at hand to demonstrate compliance; it will allow the Accommodation team to have instant oversight to ensure all key stakeholders in providing accommodation from individual hall managers to the Estates and Facilities team are meeting the requirements expected by the Code.
- **Maintain a robust procedure and process for record keeping:** we have encountered non-compliance with the Code due to poor record-keeping. In the areas such as fire-safety and water hygiene, it is vital for your institution to have a procedure and process in place to indicate exactly what information needs to be captured and when this needs to take place.

Only a complete, historical, and transparent record of all necessary checks will conclude with compliance with the Code.

- **Have an appropriate oversight of your private providers:** if your are from an institution in which a number of your students are living in halls of residence that are not University owned it is vital you have a sound oversight of how those halls are managed. We would suggest that your institution conducts its own yearly audit of these private providers against the requirements of the Code. We would also recommend that documentation such as safety certificates or inspection reports be held centrally in the University Accommodation Office.

The Uniac approach to Accommodation Code of Practice

In this briefing note Uniac have hopefully provided you with guidance on why the Accommodation Code of Practice is important to your institution, some areas of compliance to be mindful of and some initial suggestions for best practice that should be implemented.

If you wish to discuss any of the issues raises in this briefing note, or would like to find out how Uniac can assist you with ensuring compliance with the Code and improving the student experience we have two specialists in this area:

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