

# COVID-19 MAKING OUR ACCOMMODATION SAFE

PLANNING & GUIDELINES



# OUR AIM

- Minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission in our halls
- Regularly review and comply with government advice and requirements
- Reassure students and those who care about them
- Re-configure and improve the student experience, not compromise on it
- Build supportive and resilient student communities- as we always have!
- Maintain high safety standards

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# 1.

## OUR APPROACH TO COVID-19

It has been a challenging few months as we have tried to navigate our way through a world pandemic, which has impacted every aspect of life.

Now that most Universities have confirmed their plans to deliver blended teaching for the first term, we have been regularly reviewing the Government guidelines and putting the necessary steps into place to welcome students to their new home in September.

We recognise that significant modifications and changes must be adopted to ensure the safety of staff and students and to help to prevent the spread of Covid-19 within our student communities. We have identified and adjusted our operational procedures to ensure that the accommodations are Covid-19 ready for when students check in and throughout the duration of their stay with us.

# 2.

## HOW WE ARE PREPARING OUR STAFF

Our on-site team have been working closely with our student communities since the outbreak of Covid-19 and have received full training on how to correctly use and apply PPE, as well as the social distancing measures required when dealing with any of our students.

Now that the majority of our students have vacated our sites for the summer, we will be refreshing all staff training in line with the Government guidelines to ensure Covid-19 prevention best practises are clear and staff are confident for the arrival of students in September.

Our team will be provided with PPE and we have adjusted the working environments to ensure social distancing between staff is maintained. We will be encouraging our staff to clean work surfaces frequently and to disinfect the office spaces.

Some of our team have been working from home since the start of the pandemic and we have a plan in place to offer a phased return for team members returning to work. The working environments and offices have been reviewed and the necessary adjustments have been put in place such as reduced number of employees in the working space, separation of working stations, protective screens where required, and we have adopted enhanced cleaning regimes.



# 3.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO OUR CUSTOMERS

### AND THE STEPS WE ARE TAKING TO ENSURE THE PROPERTIES ARE READY



We recognise that coronavirus has caused disruption to student life over the last few months and that it might be difficult to plan ahead at the moment.

We want to assure our students and their parents that they will be safe when moving into our accommodation and that their safety is our utmost priority.

We are proud of how hard the DIGS team have worked over recent months to ensure the safety of students, and we are very excited to welcome all our tenants, both new and returning, in September.

We are continuously reviewing Government guidance on how to keep students safe in a student accommodation setting. Extra measures will be put into place to ensure our students can access the accommodation and facilities in order to have the best possible student experience. We have taken several steps to protect students and staff; so that we can create an environment where our residents can feel confident, relaxed and safe. We believe this is our essential role to create a safe, welcoming home away from home for all our students.

#### These measures:

- Protective screens at reception areas and some of the social communal spaces.
- Hygiene measures around site, such as sanitising stations in key high traffic areas.
- Additional cleaning protocols around site including social communal and high traffic areas.
- Promotion of good hygiene and social distancing advice around site.
- Movement flows, and in some cases, controlled traffic to help minimise contact between individuals and to maintain appropriate social distancing.
- A tailored events plan for when students move in.
- Access to PPE for staff where it is needed.

We will advise our students that in this 'new normal' they can be assured that our accommodations are safe, secure and adhere to social distancing measures.

We are deeply committed to ensuring that extra support is in place where it is needed and in helping our students to settle in and enjoy student life despite the challenges of the last few months. Our site teams and student reps will be available to assist any of our students with any concerns they may have and to offer full support throughout the year.

4.

## PRE-ARRIVAL COMMUNICATION WITH OUR STUDENTS



In these uncertain times, we recognise the need to keep communication channels open with our students to ensure that they are kept in the loop with future plans.

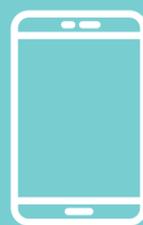
We are regularly updating the wellbeing section on our website as well as the FAQ section so that students can keep track and be up to date with our plans moving forward - [digstudent.co.uk/student-wellbeing](https://digstudent.co.uk/student-wellbeing). We will also be sharing helpful blogs which focus on things like 'how to stay busy during self-isolation'.

We have emailed students across all of our sites with the measures and changes we are implementing to ensure that our student accommodations are safe and ready. We also assured them that these steps will help to minimise the spread of coronavirus.

Prior to arrival, our students will be required to complete an online E-induction where we share and advise them of all site processes, the services we deliver and what is expected of them. This E-induction has been designed to include all information related to COVID-19, the measures we put in place, advice for the students, and site conduct they will need to follow to minimise the spread of Covid-19. This E-induction is compulsory to complete and students will not be able to check in without completing this step.

We will also be communicating with our students prior to arrival to explain the approach we are taking and plans for move-in. This will include car parking arrangements on the day, social distancing guidelines when on site, and information about booking an individual arrival slot. We will encourage students and parents to complete and finalise any administrative needs online prior to move-in day to reduce contact on the day.

We also regularly update our private Facebook groups, exclusive for our students, with relevant information and the progress we are making to keep them in the loop between now and arrival. This platform works very well as students can ask questions and receive an instant answer. We also offer Q&A sessions on our Instagram page.



# 5.

## PREPARATION AND PLANNING FOR STUDENT ARRIVAL



We are in the process of preparing our halls for student arrival. The following steps will be taken before students move in.

1. Every student will receive a DIGS branded reusable face mask on arrival.
2. Deep cleaning with high standard specification will take place this summer for all bedrooms, en-suites, bathrooms, WC's, communal spaces, corridors, and all other spaces within the halls.
2. Hygiene measures around site, such as sanitising stations in key high traffic areas will be in place and students will be encouraged to use these accordingly.
3. Additional daily cleaning protocols around site including social communal and high traffic areas.
4. The promotion of good hygiene and social distancing advice around site for our students to follow.
5. Protective screens at reception areas and some of the social communal spaces.
6. Movement flows including one-way systems, and in some cases, controlled traffic to help minimise contact between individuals and to maintain appropriate social distancing.
7. Access to PPE for staff where it is needed. Students will be encouraged to wear face masks wherever possible; it is essential to do so when using any bus service or shopping area in line with current government regulations
8. All social communal spaces across sites have been reviewed and reconfigured to ensure the space is maximised and to meet the social distancing rules.
9. At Storthes Hall Park, we are in regular communication with our bus provider, First Bus, to ensure we are fully aware of the rules for using buses, and the extra measures that must be put into place regarding capacity to allow social distancing and an increased cleaning regime. We have also created separate pick-up and drop-off points to minimise student contact.
10. At Storthes Hall Park in Huddersfield the on-site shop and social space, The Venue, will operate a cash free system.

With social distancing and student safety a priority, check in weekend will be in a different format this year.

DIGS will invite students to move into the accommodation 7 days prior to the contract start date for no extra cost so that we minimise the number of students and visitors coming onto site each day. We will open our appointment slot booking system by August to allow students to complete the all important and comprehensive online E-induction and to book a check in appointment.

There will be a limited number of appointments available per day accommodating 12 appointments per hour between 9.00am-17.00pm. Any students who require an appointment outside of this timeframe will be required to contact their site accommodation team to make alternative arrangements.

# 6.

## GUIDANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WHO ARE REQUIRED TO SELF-ISOLATE FOR 14 DAYS

DIGS will invite international students arriving from countries that require self isolation on arrival, to move into the accommodation 14 days prior at no extra cost to allow them to complete the required 14 days of self-isolation.

We plan to move these students directly into their allocated accommodation where they will form part of a new student 'household'.

As per the government guidelines, for students travelling to the UK from countries where they will be required to self-isolate, they can live in flats with others who are forming a new household. During their period of isolation, they will need to avoid spending time in the shared areas of their flat and residence when others are present in those shared spaces. They should not have visitors, including friends and family, unless they are providing essential care. They will not be able to go out to attend classes or lectures or visit public places. They should not go shopping. If they require help buying groceries, other shopping or picking up medication, they should contact our site teams to make arrangements for these items to be delivered to their flat.



# 7.

## GUIDANCE FOR HOUSEHOLDS WITH A POSSIBLE CORONAVIRUS INFECTION

### HOW IS THIS MANAGED, WHAT DOES SELF-ISOLATION MEAN AND WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

We will be advising all customers that by moving into a new house or flat, they are forming a new household and therefore social interaction within the household is allowed. Interactions with others outside of the household must be minimised as much as possible. This may change over time and we will keep students updated through our private Facebook groups.

#### SELF-ISOLATION

We will be advising students to follow the government guidelines regarding self-isolation and to take the necessary steps if they show any symptoms.

Students who are self-isolating should not move home. Where a student has symptoms of Covid-19 they should self-isolate and self-isolation must be applied to the entire household for 14 days. This period can be shortened if a test is taken showing a negative result and students will be advised of the local testing arrangements or how they can obtain testing via the postal system. They will be advised that in this case, all members of the household will need testing.

We will ask our students to notify us if they are required to self-isolate so that our teams are aware and can act accordingly. This way we can keep track of students isolating on site, protect our teams, and provide any required support to them while they are self-isolating.

#### VISITORS AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

We understand that moving to university is a big milestone and that family members will want to help students move into their new home and the advice we will be providing will be based on what is practical and likely to be effective.

We will be communicating with the student and guarantor prior to arrival to ensure they are clear on the following arrangements:

- They should spend as little time in the house or flat as possible
- The house or flat should not be used by parents for any socialising (either with other students or parents)
- Soft furnishings should not be utilised other than by members of the household
- No eating or drinking should take place in the house/flat.

This is primarily intended to protect parents themselves from the risk of infection from inter-parental activity or from other members of the new household.

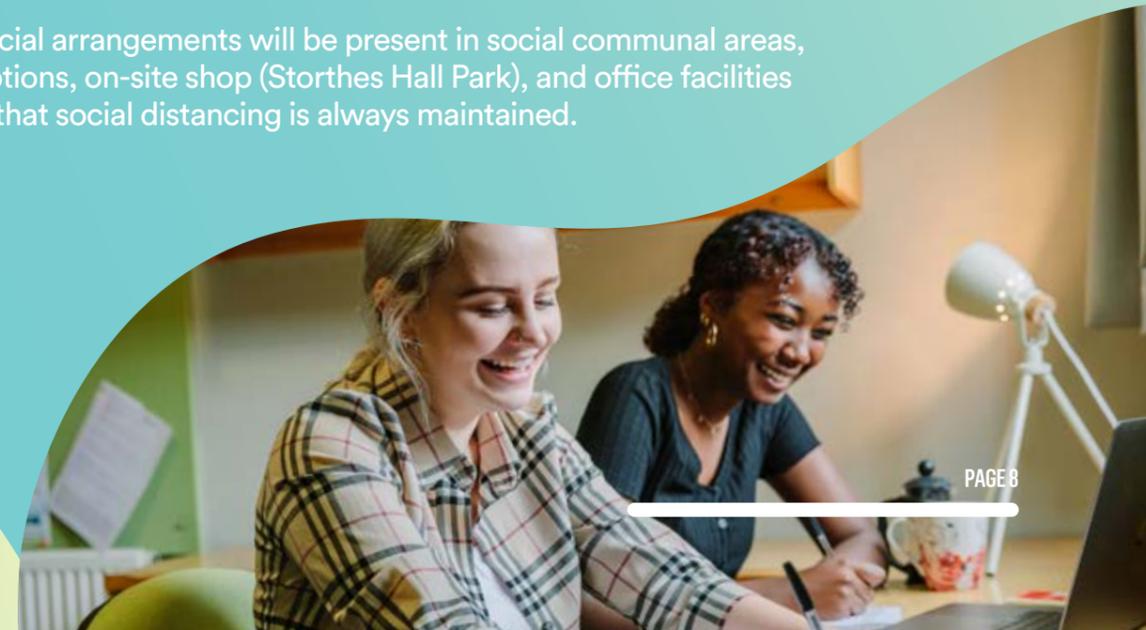
Once students have moved into their new household, visits home should be reduced to minimise the transmission of the virus.

The guidelines on visitors and social interaction will be changing constantly but we will be communicating expectations to our students.

#### SOCIAL DISTANCING

Social distancing will be continuously promoted to students through the presence of signage across the site, one-way systems where required, specified number of people allowed in certain social communal spaces and by regularly sharing reminders on our social media platforms.

These special arrangements will be present in social communal areas, lifts, receptions, on-site shop (Storthes Hall Park), and office facilities to ensure that social distancing is always maintained.



8.

# HOW WE ARE SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS

We recognise that the past few months have impacted individual lives in so many ways and we want to ensure that our students have all the support and assurance required when moving into their new home.

Students are more likely to suffer financial hardship and we will be able to assist by offering alternative payment plans to assist with rent payments if required.

We also recognise that students may be suffering with anxiety, depression, and in some cases may have experienced bereavement. It is expected that some student will feel anxious about moving to University, it is a big chapter in student life and maybe even their greatest milestone yet! You can be assured that when living with DIGS they will be part of a big community where we all look out for one another. We will ensure that support is available, as always, and will work closely with our university partners to provide support to any student in need.





9.

## HOW WE ARE MAINTAINING AND DELIVERING A STUDENT EXPERIENCE

At DIGS, we pride ourselves on the social life, events, and activities that we deliver to our students each year. Whilst none of us can be certain what the next few months will look like, we are certain that our customers will have an amazing student experience when they live with us. Not only will they have access to amazing facilities, we will also make sure that there is plenty to get involved in. We are still working on what this looks like and will be sharing our events plan with our students in more detail soon.

Our students have access to our private Facebook groups where they can find their flatmates and form relationships prior to moving in, as we know this step can be daunting to some and this way they all know each other well before they move in.

We're looking forward to welcoming our students in September and can't wait to deliver and be part of another great year!



