

Birmingham International Student Homes

Annual Review
2019

Supportive

Caring

Safe

Friendly

Comfortable



Chairman's message

A home away from home

How can it be another year since our last Annual Review? What a privilege it is to host over 275 guests who have come to the UK from 46 countries to improve their knowledge and experience, and to make their own countries a better place. How vital in turbulent political times that we encourage education for poorer and less able countries. Surely this is the key to a future peaceful world of shared resources.

The number of the residents has been reducing in recent years as, on average, our guests stay longer. However, room occupancy remains high.

The driving force for your trustees of BISH and our much valued staff to do more and more to support and care for the "strangers in our midst" coming to Birmingham, is the hope that their learning will impact so many more back home and that they themselves become engines for improvement in their own land. The majority of our guests find their way to us from personal recommendation. Those recommendations come from people who have experienced at first hand our love, care and support.



Our aim is to provide these valuable people with a home away from home. In this review we have tried to bring you a flavour of what that can mean. Of course we offer a place where they can feel safe and secure; where they will find care and support when they encounter a difficulty with language, in understanding our ways and culture, or indeed just wrestling with our bureaucracy; and where they can find love and support whatever their class, race or faith.

But as people stay longer with us it is a delight to see them spreading their wings, seeing something of our delightful country and its heritage and enjoying the experience together whilst studying hard. Indeed, we find every year that our residents make friends from other countries that we know will last a lifetime.

Last year we paid tribute to trustee and director Mike Fisher retiring after more than 50 years' voluntary service. I am so pleased to tell you that we have appointed Carolyn Humpherson as our new Company Secretary. She has a wealth of experience as a Company Secretary of some of the UK's major businesses. How good to welcome her on board.

Our trustees and directors are all volunteers of course. Together they ensure that our financial position remains secure and that we continue to fund programmes to improve accommodation on both sites. This is important for the comfort of our guests.

It has also been a delight to have with us our family from Syria who had lost their home and their livelihood. They have settled into a very different world well and it is with sadness, but excitement, that we shall soon have to wish them well on the next phase of their development, as they prepare to leave us for a home of their own.

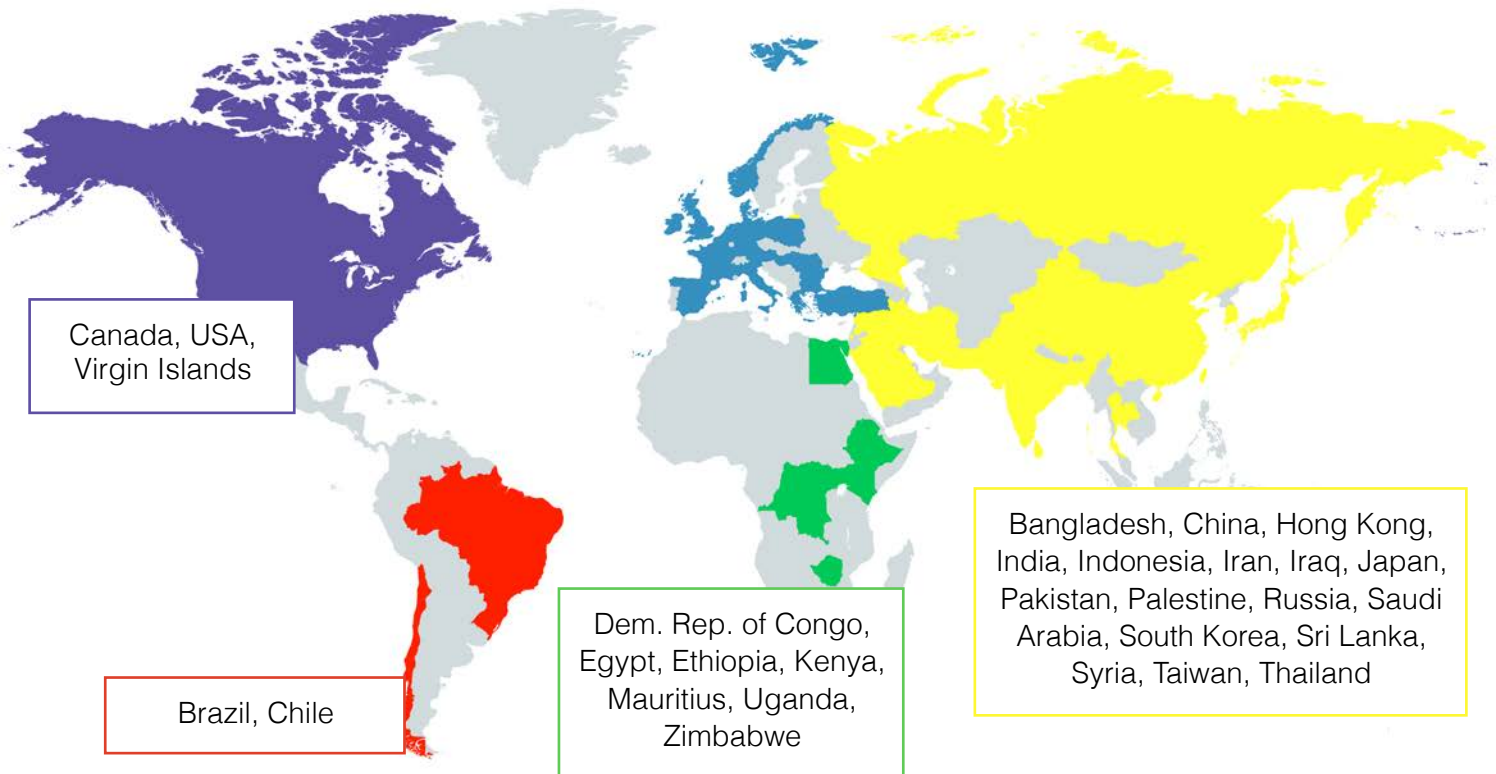
So we look forward to a New Year with a clear sense of our role and purpose. In offering a 'Home away from Home' we seek to encourage international students to learn in this country and take knowledge back with them to improve life for many people in their own country. Our aim is that they feel safe, secure, cared for and loved whatever their class, creed, or culture and that they return home ready to send others to us in their turn.

I am so grateful that our directors and staff are so dedicated to that goal.

Lawrie Rumens

Where are our residents from?

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom



The 2018-19 financial year was one that saw high occupancy, with residents staying longer than in some previous years. Possibly as a consequence, we have seen some differences in terms of the numbers of residents compared to the previous year along with some changes in the span of nationalities. The above map details the countries of origin of our residents which, overall, is down 6% on 2017-18. If we consider the Americas as one area, it, along with Europe and Asia have seen small reductions in the number of nationalities of our residents with Africa seeing the only increase, over doubling the number of countries from 3 to 7.

The overall number of people staying with us across our two houses has reduced year on year by 22%, but with occupancy rates being high, this means we are seeing students and their families staying with us for longer and are gratified by this situation. Our flats at Asbury have been in demand for families and 24 children have lived in our premises. We are also delighted that once again a baby has been born during the year.

Our residents

In the past year we have seen:



46 nations



251 residents

126 at Asbury
125 at Wesley



1 baby born

24 children

Social Life

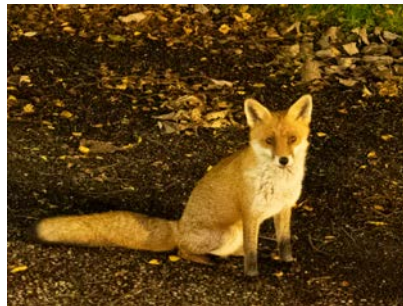
Question no. 1: How high is the Eiffel Tower?



Every Wednesday, a group of BISH residents goes to the pub quiz at the Selly Park Tavern. Playing as a team, we answer trivia questions that cover a wide variety of topics including music, movies, geography, science, and sports. While we would love to win the first place £25 gift card, we have a great time no matter where we finish. (And to be honest, there have been 1, 2, or 7 last place finishes.) Regardless, it provides an opportunity to learn about British culture and to practice English. Most importantly, it has allowed us to

get to know each other, find people with common interests, and build friendships. Anyone and everyone is welcome each week, so our team is constantly evolving. Often, when a person joins for their first ever pub quiz, they express concern over whether or not they will be able to answer questions. However, if you ask anyone who has been before, they will tell you that first, you may answer more questions than you expect as in the past they have covered Italian lakes, American sport teams, and the German language. Second, the BISH team's priorities are laughing, eating, and catching up with each other. **Jackie**

Our other residents



It is not just international students and our staff that make up the life at BISH. In the Review for 2016, we reported on the family of ducks that made their home within one of the courtyards in Asbury House. This year, Nakaret, a keen photographer has spotted some other wildlife with homes close to Asbury. It was lucky that Nakaret had his camera with him on a couple of occasions and was able to capture these shots of a fox and a badger. A woodpecker has also been seen close to the house.

The location of Asbury House is often described as peaceful and quiet and we are delighted that our guests can see some wildlife native to our country whilst living here.



Two events for the residents of Asbury Overseas House



Life at BISH



My name is Noriko and I am from Japan. My husband David is doing a PhD at the University of Birmingham and we have been living at Asbury Overseas House with our 2 boys aged 9 and 6 since October 2018.

It was easy for us to settle. Staff are always around to help. Anita helped me to look for a school for the boys

and Errol carries out any repairs that are needed. Paul, Chris & Gemma organise various parties for us residents where we can meet our neighbours and eat many kinds of different dishes from around the world. It is a wonderful cultural experience.

The best thing has been meeting other families who live at Asbury. The house has a nice garden and my children often go out to play with the other kids after school. They now have friends from all over the world; Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Spain, The Virgin Islands, Malaysia, Syria, South Korea and China. Asbury is such a global place and provides a wonderful experience. All the residents help each other a lot.

They are my Asbury family and we are very happy to stay here!

Noriko

I came to Birmingham from the United States for a postgraduate teacher training course at the UoB. The prospect of this move was daunting as I did not know anyone in Europe, much less Britain. Moreover, I did not have the chance to visit and find accommodation in person, which was anxiety-inducing in itself. However, I was absolutely shocked by how quickly and easily I adapted to English life, mostly due to living at Wesley International House. Just by cooking in the kitchen, I have developed friendships with people I never would have met otherwise. Everyone is friendly, ready to explore the city, and empathetic to the challenges of moving to a new country. Being with my amazing housemates and playing on the BISH pub quiz team helped me to find the comfort and confidence to branch out in other areas of my new life, such as meeting new people on campus and around town, traveling on my own, and taking up swimming. After a long, sometimes difficult, day teaching math at a local high school, it is always a huge comfort to know that I have supportive and fun-loving friends to come home to.

Jackie



My name is Ting Li. I come from China. I am a visiting PhD student at the University of Birmingham from October 2018 to October 2019. During this year, I lived at Wesley International House.

I lived in a 3-bedroom flat for ladies. This flat is very fantastic. When I just came here, I was so surprised that most of the stuff I need for living has been provided by BISH. They provided all of the stuff in the kitchen, like the plates, the pan, the knife, the kettle, and everything you can imagine. Also, the pillow, sheet, and quilt in bedrooms are also provided. Most importantly, it is so lovely that the staff from BISH will clean our flat and bedrooms every week. My flatmates are also very kind and considerate. Some of them just lived here for several months, and new people will come so that I can meet many friends from all over the world (Ethiopia, Austria, Finland, Hungary, and so on). Also, all of the staff here are really really kind. Whenever we meet a problem in our flat, we just need to send an email to the staff, and they will solve it perfectly and efficiently. Big thanks to everyone I met from BISH. I love this accommodation.

Ting

Life at BISH



When I arrived at Birmingham in 1956, I took up lodgings at a residence quite distant from the university, and needed to take two buses to get there. Moreover, I was always cold and had to share a double room with a medical student from Kenya. He was quite distant, always absorbed in his studies and hardly spoke with me. Coming from the West Indies, where we are sometimes too friendly, it merely increased my homesickness. Then the straw which broke the camel's back. I returned from classes one afternoon to find a note from the landlady. It said that the frequent use of hot water for baths was drawing down the supply each day and bathing was to be rationed. My time was scheduled for nine o'clock Saturday mornings. One bath each week!

That day I went to the university accommodation service and asked if there were any vacancies. "Yes. One arose this morning. It is at Methodist International House (now known as Wesley International House), 52 Oakfield Road, Selly Park. It is walking distance from the university." So after lectures, I walked to the house and knocked on the door. The warden admitted me and explained that MIH catered for 25 male students, from all over the world, who were pursuing tertiary education in Birmingham. One fifth of the intake had to be English Methodists. There were no restrictions for the others with respect to race, ethnicity, religion (or lack of it) and country of origin. There were students from Hong Kong, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, Siam (Thailand), The Gold Coast (Ghana), Jamaica, Malaya, Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya. It sounded almost too good to be true.

The cost of board and lodging was reasonable, which was significant because I had to survive on £30.00 a month. Breakfast and dinner were served Monday to Saturday, and all meals on Sunday. We were responsible for clearing the tables each meal. It is a routine I have kept since. We also took turns at washing up after Sunday lunches, when the kitchen staff has their time off. There was no limit on the frequency of having baths.

Before the warden had completed her guided tour of the building, I had already decided I would move in. I accepted the offer of the vacant bed and moved in the next day. It was a decision I never regretted. For the next four years MIH turned out to be my happy home away from home.

Every Sunday, tea was provided by members of a different Methodist Church in the Greater Birmingham area. They came with a variety of tasty cakes, sandwiches, scones and pies which were thoroughly enjoyed by us students. It afforded us the opportunity to interact with people that were different from those we came into contact with at our universities. What I particularly enjoyed was the opportunity to correct certain ideas which were held about life in the colonies in general, and about Trinidad and Tobago in particular. One question frequently asked was, "What is Trinidad? Is it a town or county in Jamaica?"

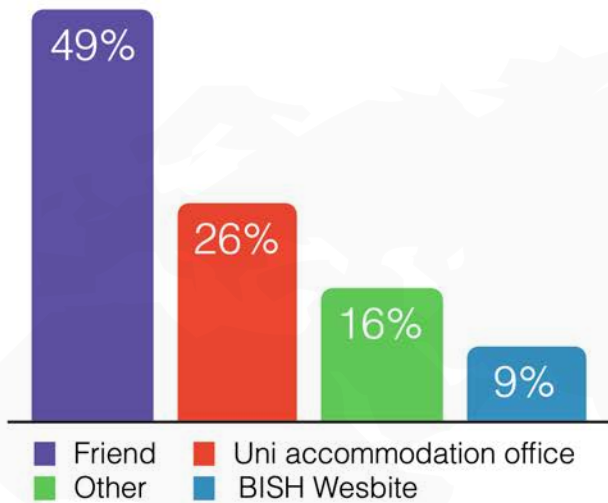
With my mind at ease with regards to accommodation, I soon fell into the routine of student life at the university. Lectures, laboratory and lunches at the refectory and weekend dances (hops) at the Students Union building.

After returning from a summer holiday in Europe, I was surprised to learn that the warden had retired and a wonderful couple, Mr & Mrs Hyde had taken over. Mr Hyde was an elderly, grey-haired gentleman who was very kind and considerate, while Mrs Hyde was an extremely warm and motherly person who immediately won the love and respect of all us boys. To this day I still consider my mother and Mrs Hyde to be two of the finest women I have ever had the good fortune to interact with in my life.

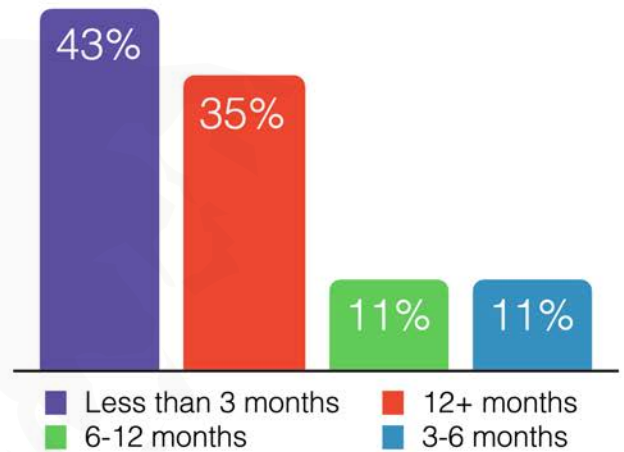
At the end of my time in the house, four years, I said goodbye to all those wonderful folks I had met at 52 Oakfield Road and flew across the Atlantic to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA. **Ronald Amoroso**

Satisfaction survey

How did our residents hear about us?



Months our residents have been with us



98% of residents felt they were provided with sufficient information



98% of residents say they have enjoyed their stay with us



100% of residents felt welcomed upon arrival



100% of residents say they are happy with the security of the buildings



100% of residents found staff to be friendly and helpful



100% of residents would recommend BISH to a friend / colleague



100% of residents found it easy to apply

The survey is pleasing in that our aim to provide a comfortable, friendly and safe place to live is being fulfilled on many fronts. The introduction of a top class Wi-Fi system has been a success with very few problems being encountered over the last year. Word of mouth continues to be our major mechanism for attracting residents, although our closer connection with the Accommodation Office at Birmingham University is bearing fruit.

The survey did throw up a number of suggestions and the management team will be examining these carefully for implementing any improvements that can be made. The upgrade of the website will certainly feature in 2020 to improve our global reach.

(Survey carried out across Wesley and Asbury houses with 54 resident responses)

Our Team

Directors

Lawrie Rumens - Chairman

Peter Johansen - Hon. Treasurer

Carolyn Humpherson - Company Secretary

Robert Dauncey

Jayne Gilbert

Dr Stuart Burgess

Malcolm Evans

This year has seen changes in personnel in both our Board of Directors and in our staff team who are responsible for the day to day running of our two properties. We are delighted to welcome Carolyn Humpherson as both a Trustee and member of the BISH Board. Carolyn takes up the role of Company Secretary following Mike Fisher's retirement after 50 years of involvement with Methodist International House and BISH. We welcome Alison Harris and Ewa Zajac who have joined our domestic staff. They join a team who demonstrate year on year that they can provide the skills, care and support to make all our residents feel safe, secure and welcomed. It is their continued ability to provide a Home away from Home that is valued by all that stay with us and the Board of Directors.



Carolyn was born in Erdington, Birmingham over 70 years ago and moved to Sutton Coldfield when she married her husband Bill. They met at a Methodist Youth Weekend and have been married for over 50 years. They have two daughters, one of whom is a doctor and lives in Warwick and the other, a business woman who lives with her husband and children in Shanghai, China.

Carolyn is a Chartered Secretary and for the majority of her career worked as Company Secretary in three PLCs in the engineering/automotive sector. She particularly enjoyed working with the non-executive directors and with the companies' overseas directors to ensure that they complied with UK corporate governance and London stock exchange regulations. During the later years she became involved in corporate finance which involved both interesting and extensive overseas travel.

Fitness is important to Carolyn as she tries to walk at least four miles each day and plays golf two or three times a week. Along with husband Bill, they have a camper van which is used regularly to travel to mainland Europe seeking the sun. As an active member of Four Oaks Methodist Church, Carolyn has been a senior steward for the last five years and is also the treasurer of a small Anglican church in south west France.

Carolyn looks forward to serving as a Trustee and Director of BISH and contributing towards providing a Home away from Home for our residents.

I really have to say, that your accommodation is absolutely perfect. Thanks to all the work of you, Paul and all the people of the cleaning service.

Florian - Oct. 2019

I would like to thank you for providing this safe haven and home from home for me. Thank you for your kindness and help.

Alicja - July 2019

Our Team



Left to right: Front Clive, Chris, Paul, Anita, Monika
Back: Errol, Maureen, Gemma, Elzbieta, Ewa, Tracey, Alison



New staff members - Alison and Ewa



Chris our Deputy Manager

Walking between 13 to 17 miles a day, Deputy Manager Chris Sherman and his wife, Margaret, walked the Dales Way to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. Starting at Ilkley in Yorkshire, the Dales Way takes you 81 miles (129km) across a variety of terrains to Bowness-on-Windermere in the Lake District. Much of the way it follows the beautifully varied River Wharfe, but also climbs to 1,000 feet, briefly joining the Pennine Way, then on to the Lake District.



Left to right: Ewa, Monika, Elzbieta

In April 2019, three adventurous members of the BISH domestic team journeyed to a still snow covered Mt. Snowdon (Yr Wyddfa) to realise an ambition to scale the 1,085 metre summit. Ewa explained that the magic of Snowdon had remained with her since the climb. "Nothing could beat the show of nature that Snowdon gave us that day. We came back humbled but fearless!"

Refurbishments and Maintenance



Improving the fabric of our buildings has been a constant theme going right back to the 1950s when a new wing was constructed at Methodist International House (now Wesley) to meet the demands of increasing numbers of international students coming to Birmingham.

Our thanks go to Mrs Beckett, daughter of Reverend Whitfield, for sending us original slides of the construction works.

In more recent times, we have update facilities at both our houses as budgets allow. The pictures below show a communal kitchen refurbishment at Asbury Overseas House and Mat, who painted stairwells and corridors equivalent to a length of 370 feet / 95 metres during his summer break from university... that's higher than Big Ben!



Refurbished kitchen at Asbury Overseas House



Mat Chapajong



Future Developments and Finance

For the financial year, 2018-19, the continued vigilance of the Board and the Management Team at BISH to remain within budgeted expenditure and seek value for money, along with high occupancy levels has led to a strong overall financial position. Routine maintenance has been carried out where necessary with improvements being made to a number of bathrooms. The kitchen at Wesley House has been upgraded with new fridge and freezer equipment. One key area where budgeted spend has not been carried out has been for the upgrade and development of en-suite rooms in the stable block at Wesley. A combination of different plan developments and receipt of planning permission late in the financial year has meant that this expenditure will be carried forward to 2019-20. It should be noted that although the costs associated with the provision of a third party Wi-Fi system have been above budget expectations, this is now our third largest overhead but is working well and is of the essential standard required for a student environment.

This year we invested close to £82,000 in maintaining and improving our properties. Bathrooms have been refurbished, new kitchen equipment supplied at Wesley and decorative work carried out at Asbury. Further proposed expenditure will now be carried over to 2019-20 as stated above.

Future developments

The building of new student accommodation in Birmingham carries on apace with more planned and some to be completed in the next year. This continues to be assessed against our plans and provision, hence our continued drive to convert to en-suite facilities where possible. Our aim is to have the Stable Block conversion at Wesley completed during the next financial year. We will also watch closely any effects that the proposed Brexit may have on applications to us from European countries and how exchange rates may make post-graduate studies more attractive in other countries.

We continue to monitor and be aware of the potential costs of maintaining ageing building stock.

Asbury is an international house which gave us the opportunity to find friends from different countries. Very helpful and friendly staff was the other reason we really enjoyed our stay at Asbury.

Reza - Nov. 2019

And here is what Arooj and Ayesha think...

Thank you so much for the wonderful time and for making our stay so comfortable and pleasant. We would always remember your hospitality.

Arooj & Ayesha - Sept. 2019

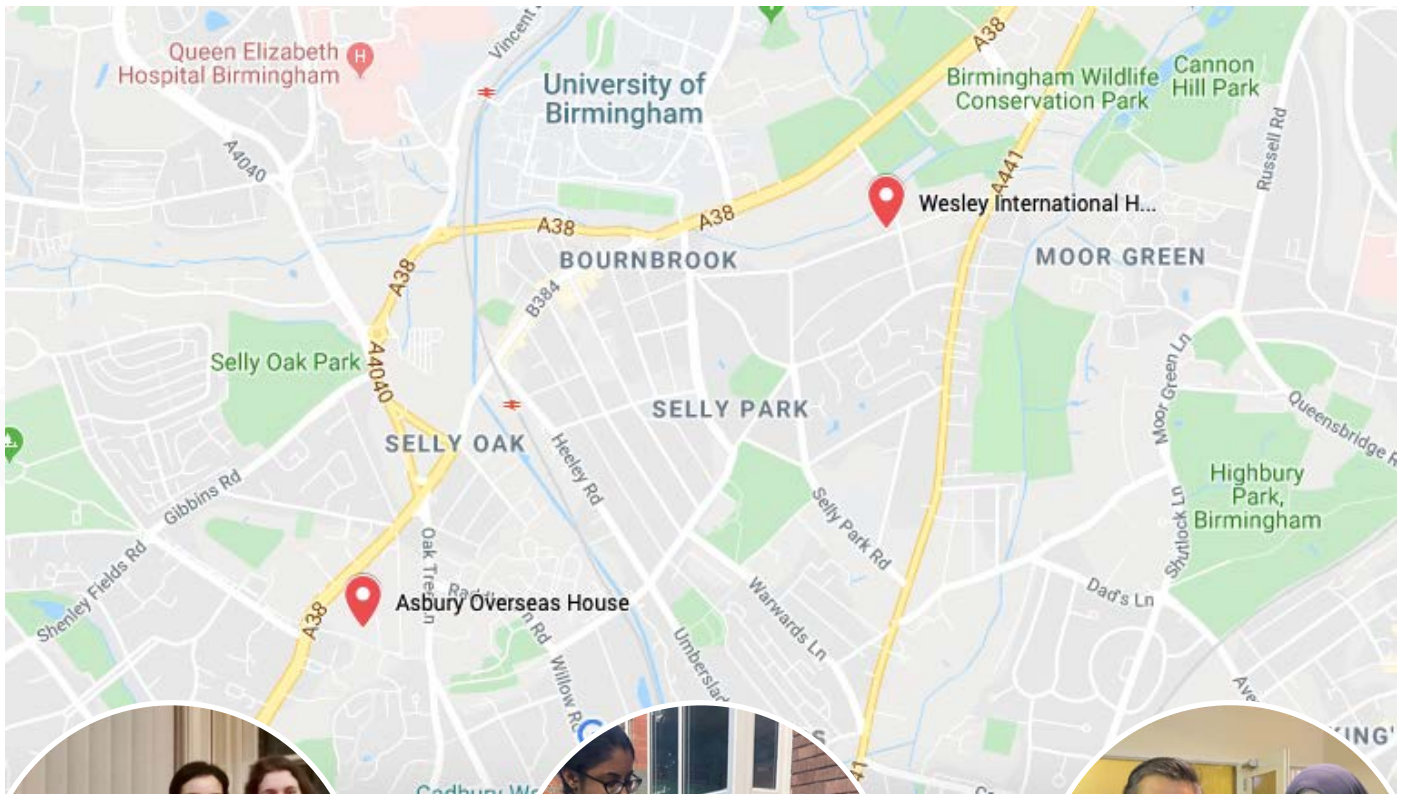
And in May Hagar said this about us...

I would like to thank you for your efforts to make BISH a very pleasant place to stay. I'm going to miss you. I will definitely come back whenever I'm in Birmingham. I really felt at home at Asbury.

Hagar - May 2019

Birmingham International Student Homes' financial year runs from 1st September to 31st August. A complete copy of the statutory accounts can be obtained by writing to the Company Secretary at 52 Oakfield Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 7EQ

Where to find us



Get in touch

We promise that staying with BISH for your education in Birmingham will be life enriching, providing an experience that will never be forgotten.

Our homes are in easy reach of the universities in Birmingham with short rail and bus connections to the City Centre.

For flats, double and single rooms at Asbury Overseas House and for single rooms at Wesley International House, get in touch;

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phone

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A Home Away From Home