

# Birmingham International Student Homes

Annual Review  
2021



**Supportive**

**Caring**

**Safe**

**Friendly**

**Comfortable**



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## Chairman's Message



In common with many other charities and companies, the last year (BISH financial year Sept 2020 –Aug 2021), has been very difficult and was impacted strongly by the Coronavirus pandemic.

At the start of the new academic year in September 2020, most universities announced that teaching would be done on-line and with global travel restrictions in place, overseas students could not return to the UK to continue their studies.

This led to few new students seeking accommodation and the occupancy levels at both of our houses fell to between 40% and 50% for most of the year.

Our income thus reduced considerably, but healthy reserves built over years of prudent management have enabled us to support the business during this major downturn and we were able continue our care and support of students and other people from overseas to continue their studies.

However, the continuing situation meant that we extended the significant changes made in our operations during the onset of the Covid pandemic. Our wonderful staff engaged in these changes and residents were specifically asked to clean their own rooms and they also helped to keep the common areas clean. It was pleasing to see such a positive and caring response from them – a true sign of how much they embrace our philosophy of creating a *"Home Away from Home"*.

The financial impact of the situation meant that we were forced to put most of the staff on to furlough for their own safety and to protect those guests remaining in residence from external infection. We have been fortunate that these prompt actions have protected the residents and we did not have a single case of Coronavirus at either house as of August 2021.

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## Chairman's Message

The Board met on a monthly basis rather than quarterly via Zoom to keep a closer watch on developments and to respond to the changing situation.

Non-essential expenditure was curtailed with significant savings being made on property repairs and maintenance. As the year progressed, it became evident that we were faced with a prolonged period of continuing uncertainty and low occupancy levels. Regretfully, we decided that it was necessary to make three staff members redundant to save costs as we reorganised our operations to match the reduced demand on our services.

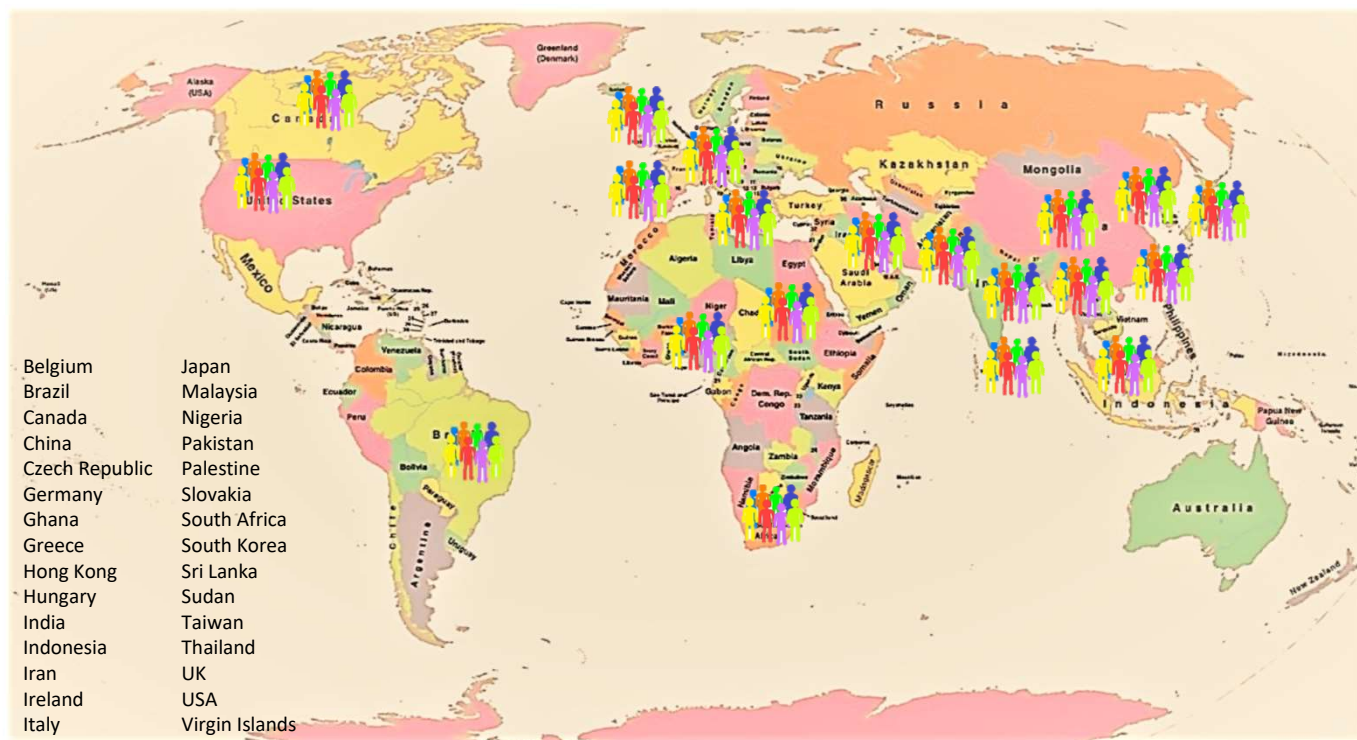
In such momentous circumstances we were still able to continue to provide a supportive “Home Away from Home” for people who are out of their own country and culture, often for the first time and some with limited English skills. Recommendation of our accommodation by previous residents and by other university students remains the most significant way in which new residents come to us. Once settled and living in our houses, it is pleasing to see how quickly residents absorb our way of life. We jointly celebrate such diverse cultures and languages living in harmony together as they organise themselves socially for a satisfying life experience.

Our success is in no short measure due to our dedicated staff, many with long experience, who are the key ingredient in creating and maintaining such a “Home Away from Home” environment to support our guests. I and the Directors/Trustees wish to record our appreciation to all the staff and supporters of the Birmingham International Student Homes for their continuing hard work and dedication to our purpose and we look forward with confidence to the future.

At the end of this year, the impact of the vaccination programmes, easing of some travel restrictions and work carried out by the universities to bring back face to face learning leads us to hope for a more successful year in 2021-22.

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# Where are our residents from?



The continuation of the global pandemic across the start of the 2020-21 academic year and the new BISH financial year had led to an overall occupation level of under 50% in BISH. The departure of students was a function of many factors which included the stage of their studies, the ability to continue studies online, the impact of not being able to conduct research in University buildings, the ability to get flights or other transport modes across the globe along with entry and transit restrictions in most countries and many others. However, those that were able to stay with us continued to be from a large range of countries, with the number of nationalities only being reduced by 30% on a normal year. This has enabled us to again demonstrate that we provide a Home Away from Home for a wide range of international students. Covid-19 aside, it has to be noted also that the 2020 financial year was indeed atypical in that we did not celebrate the birth of a baby amongst our residents.

## Our residents

In the past year we have seen:



32 nations



128 residents  
80 at Asbury  
48 at Wesley



18 children

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# Life at BISH



**“Indrani Mahapatra who completed her PhD in Geography and Environmental Sciences at the University of Birmingham tells us about her experience of the Covid pandemic whilst living at BISH”.**

## **Staying at BISH during the first lockdown (March to August 2020)**

BISH prepared for the lockdown with superb agility. The managers ensured that we knew the COVID-19 rules and what changes they would be bringing about, e.g. hand sanitisers and antibacterial surface cleaners were put in the kitchen and bathrooms. The handtowels were removed and paper towels and small bins were added to the bathroom and toilet. They only kept the floor towel which was changed every week when the managers visited the house (with PPE). They also refilled the tissue rolls, paper towels, the sanitising gel bottles, black bin bags etc. every week.

I was clueless about the shortage of tissue rolls or sanitising gels in the market and felt very blessed to be staying in BISH when I got to know about the shortage. I was impressed with BISH's adaptation to the pandemic circumstances. BISH's management put up posters to inform that mask must be worn in common places and social distancing protocols are to be followed. I got coins (in exchange of notes) for laundry too, when the managers visited once a week, which was a great help.

The microwave broke, however, when we informed the managers, we were instructed to get a spare microwave from one of the vacant kitchens, which was a superbly quick solution.

## **Post Lockdown**

From September 2020, cleaning staff started coming in two days a week and things were once again convenient and comfortable, but BISH maintained paper towels in the bathroom (a prescient decision) as COVID-19 did not end with the first lockdown. Only one cleaning person came in (instead of four pre-lockdown). However, she was conscientious, a perfectionist, and an exceptionally hard-working person. I think she deserves a bonus from the BISH management for tirelessly shouldering the responsibilities without lowering the quality of her work. BISH management supported me by giving me printouts which I needed urgently for official purposes. This was a help which will not be forgotten. I also needed to move stuff from University to BISH for which I needed permission from both my University (to enter the building) and BISH as I needed help from friends. External visitors were not allowed in BISH in those days. The management at BISH were very supportive and ensured that friends helping me to move stuff followed the COVID-19 safety protocols. They also, thoughtfully, left a ladder for me to keep stuff on the top shelf of the wall cupboards.

**Indrani Mahapatra**

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## Our team – 2022 news



### Welcome to **Susanna Timney**

Susie started at BISH in the role of Lettings Coordinator at the beginning of January 2022.

She received a 2:1 (Hons) degree in Business Administration from Cardiff University in 2006 and lived and worked in the area before relocating to Birmingham in 2010 with her husband.

After she had her children she returned to a part time role at Four Oaks Methodist Church as Church Secretary in 2017. Now she splits her work between the Church and BISH.

Susie loves reading, socialising and photography to name a few things, but the majority of her time is spent being a mum, a role which is very important to her.

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### Welcome to **Baby Zoe**

She was born to our staff member Ewa on 9th January 2022 weighing 2.4kgs.

Mum Ewa started working at BISH in September 2019 as a domestic cleaner at Wesley International House and is currently enjoying maternity leave with baby Zoe until January 2023.



### Directors

Andrew Steel - Chairman  
Peter Johansen - Hon. Treasurer  
Carolyn Humpherson- Secretary

Stuart Burgess  
Robert Dauncey  
Malcolm Evans

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# IT Update

After our internet infrastructure was completely overhauled in 2017, we began to see the limitations of the BISH website which had been running for approximately 10 years.

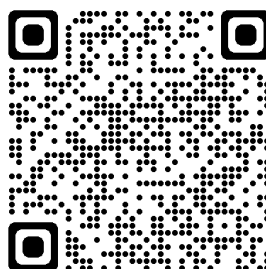
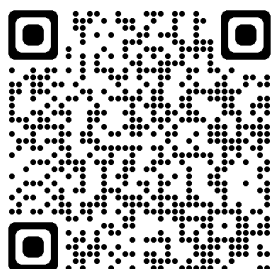
The development of a new website began in earnest but stalled during 2018 and then finally our new version went live in November 2019. The new website was intended to provide better information about BISH and its accommodation and to be more user friendly for our potential international residents who may not have English as their first language.

With the Covid-19 pandemic raging around the world for the next two years, our primary goal was to ensure that our website gave links to the latest UK government and University of Birmingham information.

We also knew we wanted to portray our accommodation in a more accurate and efficient way and used the quieter period to catalogue our rooms and flats using both still photography and videos.

We were also keen to encourage the feeling of a community and as part of our ongoing commitment to our ethos of “A home away from home”, we now have a social media presence.

Although it is still early days, we have a Twitter and Facebook account with QR code links shown below. We are very keen to have feedback from our residents past and present on what they would like to see on these channels and how they would like to participate.



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# Future developments and finance

The reduced occupancy at both houses due to the pandemic lowered income dramatically. The financial impact of the situation meant that BISH were forced to put most of the staff on to furlough for their own safety and to protect those guest remaining in residence from external infection. We were fortunate that these prompt actions protected the residents and we did not have a single case of Coronavirus at either house during the 2021 financial year.

The Board of Directors met on a monthly basis via Zoom to keep a closer watch on developments and to respond to the changing situation. Non-essential expenditure was curtailed with significant savings being made on property repairs and maintenance. All planned major projects such as the conversion of a number of rooms to en-suite facilities were halted. As the year progressed, it became evident that we were faced with a prolonged period of continuing uncertainty and low occupancy levels. Regretfully, it was decided that it was necessary to make three staff members redundant to save costs as we reorganised our operations to match the reduced demand on our services.

As the 2021 financial year came to an end and the new academic year was about to start, travel restrictions started to be eased, the University of Birmingham and others were indicating that more face to face learning may be possible and thus BISH will review all expenditure in the light of possible increased income.

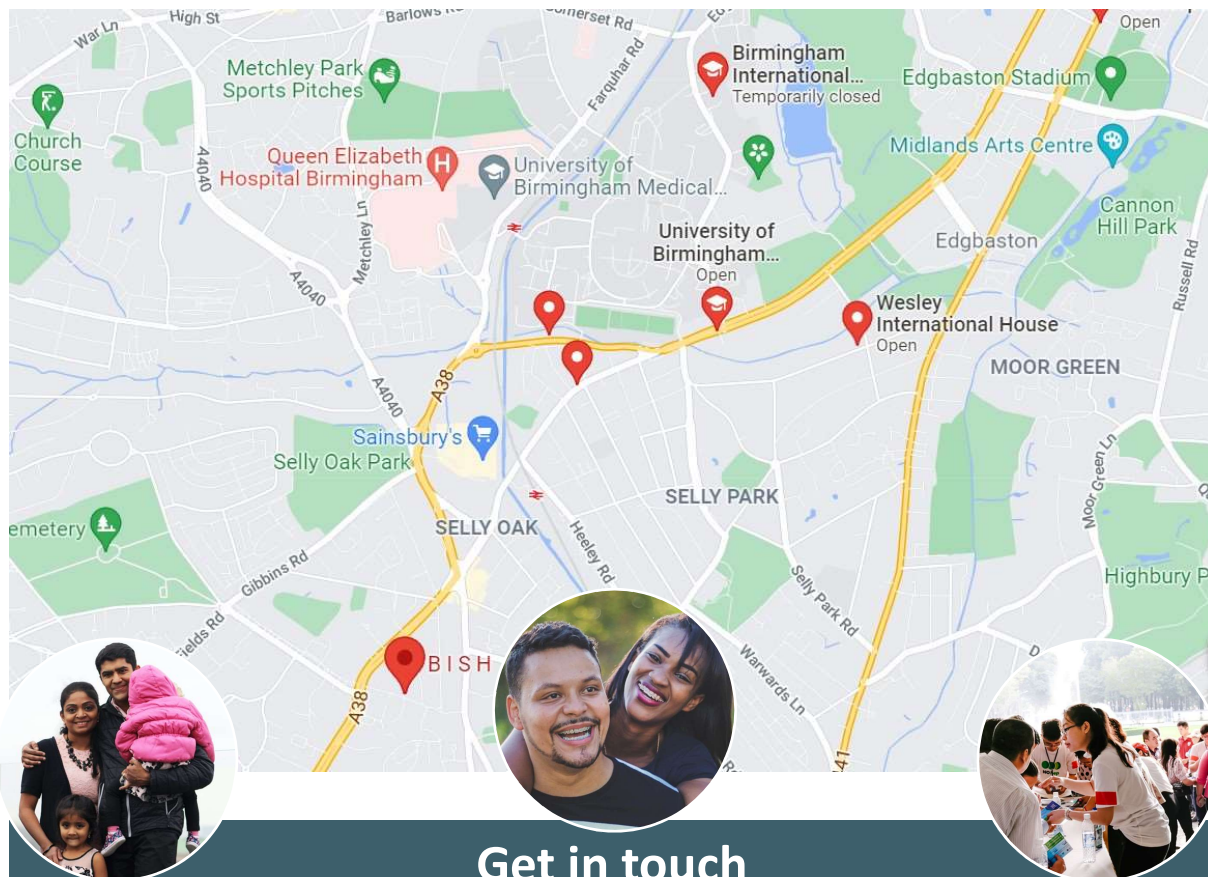
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Birmingham International Student Homes' financial year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> August. A complete copy of the statutory accounts can be obtained by writing to the Company Secretary at 52, Oakfield Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham,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

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# 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



+44 121 472 0109



enquiries@bish.org.uk

We have a new website!

[www.bish.org.uk](http://www.bish.org.uk)

Company limited by guarantee no. England 4428382

**A Home Away From Home**