Finance and Commercial Advice note for Departments

Guidance on Airbnb, Uniplaces and similar accommodation providers

The University’s Financial Regulations (Supplementary Information Appendix 2 – Travel and Business Expenses) provides the following information:

5.3. Airbnb, Uniplaces and other similar providers

The University will not pay for accommodation booked by Staff travelling on University business in the UK or overseas through Airbnb, Uniplaces or similar providers.

The University is concerned that at present it may not be able to comply fully with its duty of care to Staff and to ensure their safety while travelling on business.

Staff must not use this type of accommodation for University business purposes.

The University has taken this stance following careful consideration of the Duty of Care that Employers have to their staff and in consultation with colleagues in the University's Health and Safety team.

Although "Business Airbnb" providers do acknowledge that they must ensure that smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms are fitted to their premises, there remains a lack of clarity about the required full levels of liability insurance. The extract below from Airbnb’s web site confirms that they advise, but do not mandate, full levels of liability insurance:

In addition, our background research and comparison to the stance adopted by other Universities concludes that we cannot support the use of Airbnb because:

- There is no guarantee of a separate secure key for the room or any other ABTA agreed security standards.
- There is no recognised standard of facilities / services.
- There is no audit/inspection of facilities / services.
- There is no protection for double booking / mistakes.
- There is no agreed process for handling money.
- There is no protection from financial failure of host.

Airbnb standards are well below that of the Hotel Proprietors Act and the International ISO standards for hotels.
Whilst we appreciate the convenience and cost considerations that staff and students have when booking business related accommodation, these factors cannot over ride an employer’s legislative duty of care responsibilities. In the event of an incident relating to accommodation used by staff and students whilst on University business, it is vital that the University can rely on there being correct and full levels of liability insurance in place by the provider. Staff and students should not expect that the University will routinely accept any lack of clarity in this area and hence the new Financial Regulations as stated above must now be adhered to.

As a University that has international activities we do however recognise that some of the less developed countries and the more remote regions into which colleagues travel to will not have any accommodation with recognised/accredited standards. This is a very different scenario to using Airbnb primarily for cost or convenience reasons, when alternatives are available that will have standards ensuring that full liability insurance is in place for visitors.

So long as the University can demonstrate that we used the most appropriate accommodation available in that remote /region or location, we should not compromise either our duty of care or our insurance covers.

The onus is therefore on the member of staff travelling to demonstrate that the accommodation booked/used was the most appropriate available from the point of view of safety and security. Reference to the lack of regulated alternative accommodation providers must be included as part of the travel risk assessment and University Travel Insurance must also be put in place.

The change to the Financial Regulations is not about stopping travel to remote regions in order to undertake recognised University activities. It is about taking, and documenting, safety and security driven precautions. We will make periodic checks on the use of any unregulated accommodation providers to ensure that compliance with the requirements as outlined above has been documented.