

**VISIT WALES/CROESO CYMRU**

**Quality Assurance**

**Hostels Accommodation Harmonised Grading Scheme**

**Impact Survey Results Report 2008**

From a mail out to 126 graded under the Hostels scheme, done in May 2008, 5 responses were received (4%). Communication with the YHA was via its head office only. YHA have 36 establishments (included in 126)

## RESPONSES RECEIVED

Between them they have 97 beds to let;  
2 are located in Mid Wales  
2 are in South West Wales and  
2 are in the South East of Wales.

2 have 4 Stars under the harmonised scheme,  
2 have 3 Stars and  
1 has 2 Stars

1 has Hostel Designator  
1 has Group Accommodation  
1 has Activity Accommodation designator and  
2 are designated as Bunkhouse Accommodation

4 accept both sole usage group bookings and bookings from individuals, 1 takes group bookings only.

4 of the 5 have a disability Access Statement.

3 consider the frequency of grading inspections (annual) to be right while 2 thought that an annual visit was too frequent.

In terms of giving enough notice to make adjustments for the harmonised scheme criteria – 4 considered this to be adequate (two years) and 1 did not know.

### Grading and its benefits

3 said that being graded benefited their business a great deal; 1 benefited a little and 1 saw no material benefit in it.

The main benefit gained by the 3 was being able to access marketing benefits only available to those in grading, followed by consumer use and awareness of the grading scheme then the fact they received encouragement to make improvements in quality.

### Harmonisation

Only 1 answered about overnight stays by assessors to test the facilities/services. This one strongly agreed that it is essential for assessors to stay overnight and that it is a worthwhile exercise. This was a 3 Star business with 13 beds to let in SE Wales.

On the principle of harmonisation, 4 thought it was a good thing and the fifth had no strong view either way, and after having received a grading inspection under the new

scheme, 3 still thought harmonisation was a good thing with a fourth operator having no strong opinion.

On expectation of grade and level of satisfaction with that grade, only 2 were as expected with another 2 getting a grade that was lower than anticipated. 3 of these were satisfied but one said he was “Unhappy” with the result. This hostel operator is considering ceasing his/her participation in grading.

#### Issues of concern arising from harmonisation

Since adopting the harmonised schemes, a few issues have been raised with Visit Wales so views were sought.

Participants were asked to register their agreement or otherwise with four comments.

1. “Using stars to quality grade all types of serviced accommodation makes perfect sense”. 4 agreed or strongly agreed with this with 1 replying “Don’t know”
2. “Designators such as “Hostel, Bunkhouse etc are useful because they tell the customer what style of accommodation to expect.” Only 1 disagreed with this with the other 4 agreeing or agreeing strongly.
3. “Visit Wales should take immediate action against businesses that habitually misrepresent their rating in public” 3 strongly agreed and 2 agreed with this.
4. “Hostel style accommodation should feature under “self-catering” in accommodation guides. 1 agreed strongly, 2 agreed and 2 disagreed.

#### Environmental Issues and Harmonisation

On being asked if the harmonised scheme took sufficient notice of environmental good practice, 3 felt that it did not. 1 said that it did and 1 did not know. Those that thought it did not give attention to this issue were invited to comment on what changes should be made to the scheme to address this. Comments given were

“Measures taken by the operator to encourage recycling and efficient energy use should be reflected in the grading given”

“No mention was made about our environmental friendliness at all. We are part of a separate - Green Dragon- scheme.”

“Environmental awareness and systems in place should go towards outcome of grading”

*Other Issues relating to harmonisation*

Responders were asked to list up to three things, other than environmental issues that they would like to see changed about the harmonised scheme. 1 operator only said:

“Since most if not all Bunkhouses aim to book groups on a “sole use” basis, they should not be in the hostels category. They do not function anything like hostels do. Enquirers especially backpackers and small numbers of people find this very confusing. Bunkhouses are more suited to the Self Catering category. I suggest this also applies to Group Accommodation”

*Future Intentions regarding future grading participation*

Visit Wales asked responders whether they intended to continue in its grading scheme for the next two to three years.

4 of the 5 are intending to remain in the scheme. The one intending to leave cites the reason as “general dissatisfaction with the grading scheme, in particular, Bunkhouses being in the hostels category...”

CONCLUSION

With a disappointing rate of response at 4% of graded stock from this sector, views given cannot be considered representative enough to give Visit Wales or Visit Britain/Visit Scotland a steer on any changes to the harmonised scheme at this time.