

## UNDERSTANDING BBELS STUDENT HOUSES

Student house accommodation is very important to BBELS. It provides quality accommodation close to BBELS and Byron Bay's centre. The houses are located in quiet residential areas – where local people live peacefully. Most local people do not like living close to student houses.

We know of only 2 or 3 other schools in Australia that offer this form of residential accommodation. Many schools have apartments or buildings where students are controlled by a manager.

We do not have managers in our houses. We do not have CCTV inside the houses. However, it is being considered for the living and outside areas (not bedrooms).

Student houses are the most difficult part of our school operations. We know what students want – a place to entertain, have friends, party, etc. However this is impossible.

We have to enforce student house rules if they are broken. If we do not, then every student has the right to break the rules. This is unsustainable.

It is difficult to get proper insurance on the houses due to the fact that the people living in the houses are students. They are excited to be in Byron Bay, excited to be in a house by themselves (often for the first time), and excited to be living with people from other countries.

Students often forget to put out the garbage, turn off lights, turn off fans, and lock the doors. For years we gave warnings about these issues to students. But the problems continued. So we started a small fine system (warning then \$5 then \$10) 5 years ago. Once money was involved, students start to listen and become more responsible in the house. Only 10 – 15% of our students receive fines.

For many students it is their first time living away from their parents. They do not understand how to live with others. Many do not accept the responsibilities of living together. Many have never cleaned a house.

Many students want to have friends for dinner. We allow this (2 guests maximum at any one time) until 9pm. However from 9pm until 9am guests are NEVER allowed in our student houses. This is a Level 1 rule and heavily enforced.

Many students are studying for the Cambridge or IELTS exams. They enjoy a peaceful, quiet existence in the house. They study at nights, eat together, share cultures/cooking with their house mates or they go out to the local pubs and clubs. This lifestyle is encouraged. Students are encouraged to party and socialise in the town.

Some students are financially challenged. They do not want to go out to pubs/clubs. Often these students will have parties – dinner parties or just drinking parties – in student houses. We do not want that to happen. There are usually 4 – 6 students living in each of our BBELS houses. They all deserve the right to a peaceful night (study, sleep, movies, TV) in the house from 9pm. If one student invites 4 friends, that can mean 9 – 10 people in the house.

In our early days, new students complained when they arrived on a Saturday into houses that were dirty, full of people sleeping on lounges, beer bottles everywhere. The new students arrived very tired after long international flights. They were not happy to find the houses in these conditions.

The student houses are an extension of the school. English use is encouraged. We attempt to ensure a good mix of nationalities in the houses to ensure that English must be spoken.

The rule system is made known to students in the following way:

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1. By agents who advise our students before they enrol (this is the best way as it can be in their mother tongue)
2. It forms part of the Student House confirmation, combined with a letter from BBELS director.
3. First day orientation (once in the general orientation and again in the accommodation orientation) = twice in 1 hour.
4. They sign a contracts, agreeing to abide by the rules. If students chose not to sign, then they have 2 weeks to find alternative accommodation.
5. In week 2, students are reminded of the rules and what happens when they are broken.
6. By signs in the house with all rules in writing.

Bonds that are held from students (for breaking student house rules) are used to upgrade house facilities.

BBELS owns some houses but also rents some houses. It is very difficult to rent houses. Landlords (house owners) do not want their houses rented to students. It is only when we explain to them the rules and weekly inspection system used in our houses that some landlords agree to rent to us. Usually there are conditions in the agreement.

We often get complaints from neighbours about student house noise. If the police are called then it is very bad for our reputation as a 'responsible, safe form of accommodation'. If we get too many complaints, Byron Shire Council may believe we are holiday letting and fine us.

Students are informed that we can inspect the houses **at any time** – night and day. We never inspect inside a bedroom unless there is good reason –drugs or problematic noise. We trust students at first. If they show signs of disrespect (not cleaning, leaving doors unlocked and lights on, complaints from other students in the house etc) BBELS staff will visit more often to fix any problems or complaints. Mostly this is welcomed. For some they see it as intrusion.

We often get complaints from **within** the house. Most students follow the rules. However, some students create problems in the house by not helping with cleaning, leaving dirty dishes etc. for others to clean, inviting guests etc. These internal complaints are usually sent by email to the director who then visits more regularly to ensure smoother relations in the house.

Many students take risks. They invite guests or have friends to sleep, take drugs, etc....but they always understand that if they are inspected, that the rules will be applied.

Departing students are checked out on a Saturday morning by BBELS staff. Some students return to the house on Saturday afternoon to stay in the house illegally for an extra night or two. This is why we now refund bonds on Mondays or by bank transfer. If a student stays illegally, their bond is not refunded.

On average 5 students are evicted each year. They lose their \$200 bond. Rent for the weeks they paid is only refunded once another student is placed into that bed – a replacement. An evicted student can stay for a few nights in our student hostel. We help them by transferring them and their bags to their new accommodation. We understand that it is a distressing situation for evicted students. BBELS staff support them through the transition.

We hope this improves your understanding and appreciation of our student house accommodation. It remains the most popular form of accommodation at BBELS.