

Hospitality Schemes for International Students

Why set up a hospitality scheme?

Coming to a new country is an exciting opportunity for international students. However, for many students, it can also be a lonely and disorienting experience. They might feel isolated, experience culture shock, and find it difficult to meet local people and make friends.

A hospitality scheme helps international students to make friends and feel welcome by giving them the opportunity to be invited into a local home, meet local people and discover local culture and customs. Students are put in touch with a local person or family who will invite them to their home for an occasional meal. (Two single people might choose to band together to host students together – sharing the tasks of communicating, cooking, transport, etc.) Some students establish lasting friendships with their hosts and have made several return visits.

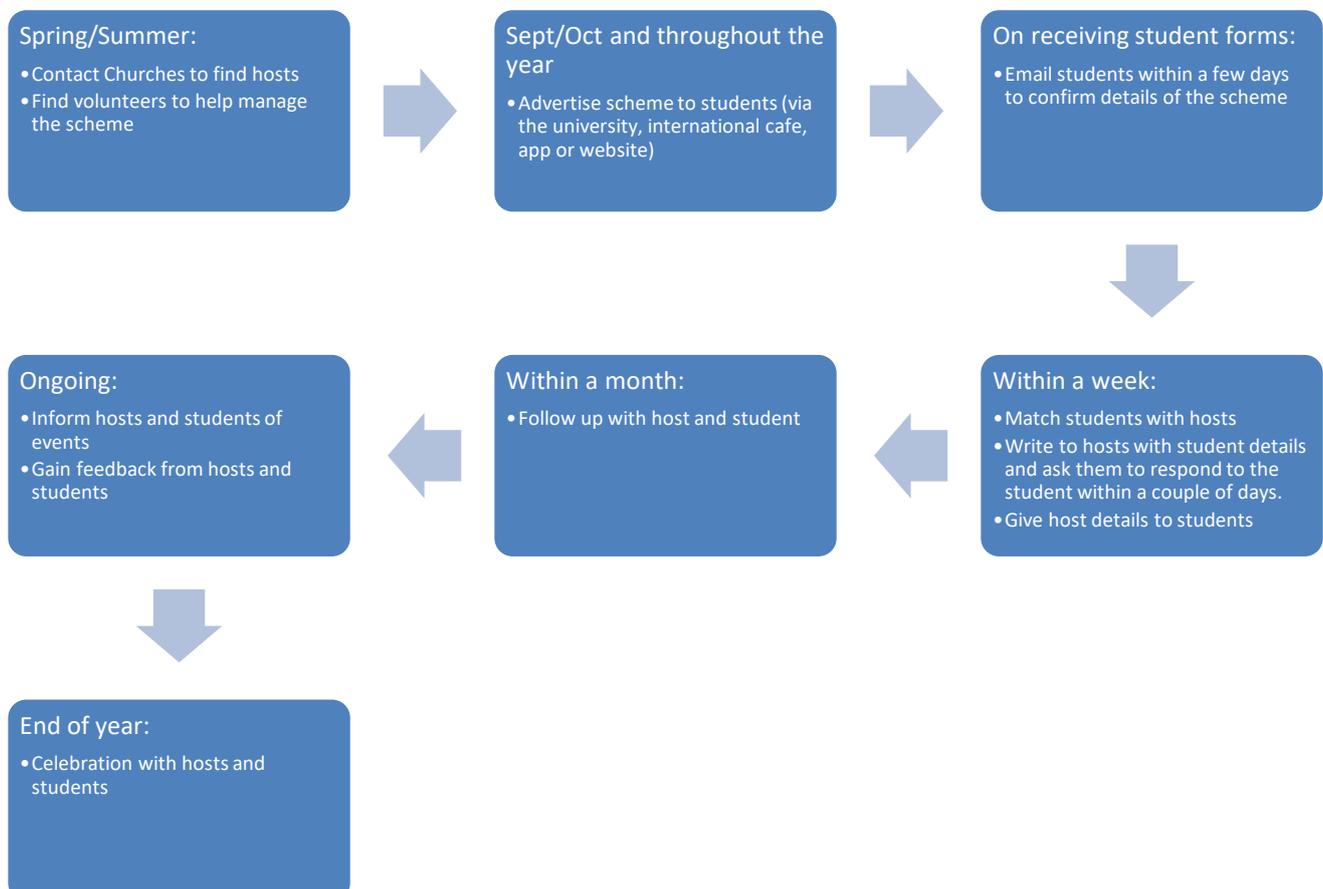
The diagram and guidelines on the following pages outline a suggested timescale for setting up a hospitality scheme. They are based on an inter-church model, but could easily be adapted for a single-church approach.

How to set up a hospitality scheme to launch at the start of the academic year:

Prior to setting up a scheme it is worth asking yourself the following:

- Do you have volunteers who would be happy to help support you on the scheme?
- Do you have the time to maintain the administration and advertising of the scheme? It is time consuming.

To run well, the scheme requires administration as well as advertising both on campus and in churches.



Details of how to set up a hospitality scheme:

1. Promote the scheme to find hosts

- a) Make a list of local churches.
- b) Contact the church leaders and explain the scheme.
- c) If the church is interested, you can either offer to give a 5-minute talk during the service (or at another suitable church gathering) or leave information material with the leader.
- d) If you give a talk (e.g. during a service), be available afterwards to answer questions and give out more information and a sign-up sheet for hosts.
- e) When you have a list of people who have offered to be hosts, ask the church leader to go through the names with you. Not everybody is suitable to be a host, which is why it is important to ask the leader for their recommendation. In addition, it means that the leader is aware of who is involved in the scheme. You could, if appropriate, ask for a simple reference from the church leader or home group leader on the form for hosts. One way of managing this is to use an application form for volunteers and hosts which has a place for the minister to write their reference.
- f) Remember to mention to potential hosts that this is an opportunity to develop friendships with international students, and that most of the students who sign up for the scheme will not be Christian. It is recommended that you meet with hosts in their home to give an overview of the code of conduct (<https://friendsinternational.uk/host-code-of-conduct>), clarify expectations, answer their questions and to make sure you know the hosts and their situations.

2. Promote the scheme to find students

- a) Contact [Jack Bentley](#) to discuss the Friends International app and whether the infrastructure can help you manage hosts and students in your area. You'll need to be a staff or affiliate of Friends International to do this.
- b) Contact the Christian Union / Friends International staff worker in your area, and find out if there is an international café, or an international welcome event, where you could advertise the scheme, either in person, or by leaving some leaflets. An international café may already have its own leaflet, in which case, perhaps they can incorporate the host scheme as one of the options students can sign up for.
- c) Contact the University Chaplaincy and/or the University International Office to introduce the scheme to them. Does your university have an international exchange scheme that you can connect with? Ask if you can put up posters / sign up forms to make the scheme known to students. The university may like to advertise the scheme on their website, or via email to the students. They may have a welcome event where you could come and speak to students at the beginning of the academic year.
- d) Distribute forms for students to people you know who have contact with international students – e.g. university staff, Christian students at the university, via other societies at the university.
- e) Ask churches to promote a digital version of the form (or use google forms) on social media across the town.
- f) If you are not using the Friends International app then it is recommended that you store data, especially emails and addresses, securely using an online database. One way of doing this is by using google forms which allows online sign-ups that go directly into an accessible spreadsheet.

3. Matching students and hosts

- a) You will need to set up some kind of list or database/spreadsheet for the hosts and students, in order to match up the students with hosts. This is where using the App can help you manage data safely and according to GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). All data needs to be held with the consent of students and hosts. Keep a record of which students you have matched with which hosts.
- b) Once you have received the forms back from the students and hosts, you should match them up as quickly as possible, otherwise students will begin to worry that they will not be invited. To promote the app again, it automatically emails you when students have signed up and helps you keep track of what part of the process each student is at.

- c) Write an email to the students within a few days (or at most a week) of receiving their form, telling them when to expect to hear from their hosts.

Example Email

Thank you for signing up for the hospitality scheme. We will be passing your details onto a local host family, and you can expect to receive an invite from them in the next two weeks/ by the end of the month. If they have not contacted you by then, or you have any other questions, please contact me.

- d) Some hints on matching hosts with students:
- It is helpful both for students and hosts if you assign at least two students per host family (your host application form should have asked hosts the maximum number of students they are comfortable hosting.) Some hosts may be single so be aware of the number and gender of students you send to hosts. Students feel more comfortable about visiting the family together, and it makes conversation easier when there is more than one student.
 - It is useful if both student and host live in the same area.
 - Check if students have expressed any preferences on the forms they filled in e.g. allergy to pets, dietary restrictions. Remember that most Muslims do not eat pork, and only eat other meat if it is Halal. Hindu students do not eat beef, and are often vegetarian. Remember to tell the hosts if their students have dietary restrictions.
 - Some hosts may give a preference of a certain country or area as they may speak the language, or have visited the area. Try to match them with students from these countries/continents.
 - Consider which hosts would be comfortable having families and/or children.
 - Tell hosts that most students prefer contact via email or WhatsApp, as understanding spoken English on the phone can be difficult initially.
- e) Email the host informing them about the students you have matched them up with, including the following:
- Thank them for getting involved and ask them to establish contact with the students within the next two weeks.
 - Let them know that you will also write to the students informing them about their hosts, so that the host is aware that the students are expecting them to make contact.
 - Include the name, gender and nationality of students. If appropriate, include any additional information the student provided you with on the form they filled in.
 - Include the information sheet [Hints for Hosting International Students](#) (available from the Friends International website).
 - Let them know that you are happy to help if there are any problems. Ask them to let you know immediately if they are unable to contact the students, and tell them you would appreciate any feedback.

Example Letter:

International Student Hospitality Scheme

Many thanks for your willingness to invite international students for a meal in your home. I am writing to give you the names and contact details of your student(s): student's name, nationality, gender, email, address, phone number and dietary requirements if any.

Please do get in contact with your student(s) soon, even if the date you arrange for a meal is some time ahead, as new students often feel very lonely. I have told students they should expect to hear from you within two weeks. If you have problems making contact, please let me know as soon as possible. I enclose a leaflet with some hints for hosting international students. Thank you.

- f) Hosts can be encouraged to be themselves and to share their faith, in a natural way, as conversation allows - but not in such a way that it would make students feel uncomfortable. Our first aim in the hospitality scheme is building friendships. Once students have got to know hosts, they

may or may not be interested to know more about our faith *and hosts need to be comfortable with this.*

- g) Remind hosts that they should be very clear in their invites to students. It would be inappropriate, for example, to invite a student to tea, and then to take them unannounced to church, particularly on a first visit. You could include a suggested invite from hosts to students:

Example Email Invite:

Dear Student, as hosts on the International Student Hospitality Scheme, we would like to invite you to our home for a meal. Are you free to come for dinner on either Friday 5th November at 7pm, or Saturday 20th November at 7pm, or Thursday 25th November at 7pm? We will come and pick you up from your address at 6.45pm (or give details of buses), we will have a meal together, and we will then take you home by car about 10pm. Please let us know by (date) via email (phone) which date is ok, or if you are not available, we can arrange another date.

- h) Email the student with details of the host:
- Inform the student of the name of their host (we would not recommend giving the student the hosts' contact details.) Ask the students to contact you if they have not heard from the host within a given time period.
 - If appropriate, and with the host's permission, you may want to include information about the host's age, occupation, whether they have children.
 - Provide some top tips for visiting a Local Home (for example, the information given about "hospitality" in the Life UK guide).
 - Let the student know that the host will make the first contact.
 - Let the student know that you are happy to help if there are any problems and that you would appreciate any feedback.

4. Keep in Contact

- a) After one month get in contact with your hosts. You may like to ask them if they have had any problems contacting their students, or if they need any support. This will remind any hosts who have not yet done so to contact the students and invite them for a meal.
- b) If you organise social activities which hosts and students could be invited to, send them details of these.
- c) After several months, send an email to students asking them for feedback. You may also want to consider running an event for hosts in the middle of the year to gain their feedback and to input hints and tips and training as well as pray together. Hosts hearing from other hosts is a great way for people to feel they are part of something bigger and be envisioned!
- d) Towards the end of the academic year, you may like to organise a social for all hosts and students to meet and chat.
- e) You may also like to consider organising a thank you meal for all your hosts (perhaps hosted by a local church), which you could also use to recruit new hosts for the following year.
- f) Feedback: It can be very useful to send out questionnaires to both hosts and students. This helps to improve the scheme and update your database.
- g) You may like to send your hosts a copy of the Friends International newsletter *Opportunity*, which is published every three months. You can get hold of copies from Friends International. *Opportunity* contains many helpful and interesting articles on international student ministry in the UK. Alternatively (with your hosts' permission) their names can be added to the mailing list for this.

Note: there is a UK-wide hospitality scheme that is run by Host-UK. The scheme was set up by the British Council, the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices in 1987, and is now run as a separate charity. They are often looking to recruit hosts, and indeed many of the hosts tend to be Christians. Details of the Host-UK scheme can be found at www.hostuk.org