

A basic guide to starting a Bed & Breakfast business

This document is not intended to be used as a comprehensive guide, but has been produced to help you decide whether or not your premises will meet the regulations and recommendations relating to Bed & Breakfast establishments which are designed to help fulfill the expectations of visitors to Northern Ireland.

Opening a Bed & Breakfast (B&B) is not simply a matter of putting up a sign and letting out a couple of spare rooms. The cost of refurbishing, furnishing, providing proper facilities and maintaining standards can be considerable. Whilst previously, B&Bs may have been perceived as offering 'low-cost/budget' accommodation, an increasing number of B&Bs offer superior accommodation and facilities at prices equivalent to many hotels. If you provide enhanced facilities to obtain a higher tariff, or attract more guests, then the start-up costs will be greater. You should seek professional advice on the legal implications (e.g. any leasehold restrictions) as well as your taxation (including VAT), insurance and rateable valuation situation. In addition, you will have to comply with all relevant legislation, in particular The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992.

What is a Bed & Breakfast?

Under The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, there are eight categories of accommodation regulated by Tourism Northern Ireland namely, hotel, guest house, B&B, self-catering, hostel, bunk house, guest accommodation and campus accommodation.

In essence, a B&B offers comfortable overnight sleeping accommodation for visitors in separate bedrooms and must provide a cooked breakfast. You don't need to have a mansion in a scenic setting or a Victorian Villa by the sea; many successful B&Bs are based in modern bungalows in unspectacular suburbs. Most B&Bs are run by people who have had no formal training, but have a genuine flair for household management, cooking and good people skills.

A B&B may let one or more rooms – singles, doubles or family size – most B&Bs have between 2-4 bedrooms available. Planning permission may not be required if you are using 50% or less of your bedrooms, where the use for B&B is ancillary to the use of the building for domestic purposes, and the character of the building as a dwelling is clearly retained. You should, however, liaise with your local Planning Office to ensure full compliance with their legislation.

What is the difference between a B&B and a Guest house?

There are a number of differences between B&Bs and Guest houses, e.g. Guest houses must provide accommodation in not less than 3 double rooms all of which must be ensuite and offer evening meals. For more information, see leaflet "Essentials of setting up and operating a Guest house". The Guest house leaflet is available at www.tourismni.com/accommodation or by contacting the Quality and Standards department (see contact details at the end of this document).

Certification

Under The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, certification is **mandatory** for every establishment offering visitor accommodation. To apply to be certified by Tourism Northern Ireland you can either apply and pay online via www.tourismni.com/forms or complete Form 2, and submit this, together with

other relevant documentation (see information pack letter) and fee (£20 is payable for every room you intend to let, subject to a minimum of £80 and maximum £200). This fee contributes towards the cost of an inspection and is payable in advance for the first inspection. Statutory inspections take place once every four years although Tourism Northern Ireland can undertake an inspection at any time. The purpose of inspections is to ensure that the requirements appropriate to the Bed & Breakfast category continue to be met. If not, Tourism Northern Ireland may add conditions to the certificate or revoke it. All documentation referred to is available at www.tourismni.com or by contacting the Quality & Standards department (details at end of this document).

A Certification Officer will conduct an inspection to determine if the premises can be allocated to the Bed & Breakfast category. If a certificate is issued, your premises is a Certified Tourist Establishment and you may start trading. The forms and checklist are available at www.tourismni.com/accommodation.

Grading

Grading refers to the rating of a property from 1 to 5 stars. Tourism Northern Ireland launched a new Quality Star Rating Scheme in July 2011, which is operated by other UK National Tourist Boards and the AA. This scheme is open to Hotels, B&Bs, Guesthouses, Guest Accommodation, Hostels & Self Catering. **Please note that this scheme is voluntary and you are under no obligation to apply for quality star rating.**

Research has shown that tourists give preference to premises that hold an official tourist board rating. Having a quality rating will give your premises credibility and visibility which is vital in today's competitive market. Further information on how the scheme works is available on www.tourismni.com/grading. If you have any queries or would like an application pack, please contact our office by emailing qa@tourismni.com, or telephone 028 9044 1682.

Aim for excellence

Tourism Northern Ireland encourages all operators to aim for excellence. By providing enhanced facilities, amenities and additional services, you are more likely to obtain a higher letting rate, be more assured of higher occupancy for longer periods and be more likely to generate profits. These need not involve great capital outlay, but can add considerably to your product. Here are just a few ideas:

- Bedroom TVs and hospitality trays: kettle, coffee and tea, fresh milk, biscuits, etc.
- Provision of video/DVD entertainment, books/board games etc.
- Interesting gardens or farm walks
- Provision for special-interest groups or individuals e.g. picnics for walkers
- Children's safe play area
- Hire of bikes, fishing tackle, boat, golf clubs, etc.
- Guided tours of the locality
- Lessons in traditional farmhouse cooking
- Tea and coffee offered on arrival, and at other appropriate times.
- Provide packed lunches and evening meals, for an extra charge.

Guests will be encouraged to stay longer if you have something special to offer. Read the promotional literature from Bed & Breakfast establishments elsewhere for cost-effective ideas which can be adapted for your establishment whatever its size.

You should also look at the existing establishments in your intended area of operation, the facilities they offer and the rates charged. Facts about Bed & Breakfasts in Northern Ireland are available on www.tourismni.com/research

Breakfast

A choice of what is offered for breakfast should be given to all guests. Whilst many will look forward to the renowned Ulster Fry, others will want a more continental offering of chilled fruit juices, breads, cheeses, fresh fruit and cereals, etc. Specialising in home cooking and using local produce, along with choice, quality, excellent service and hospitality, will all serve towards creating a memorable stay. Treating the customer as a special visitor, ensures you and your B&B will be remembered and recommended by all who visit.

Marketing

To maximise the occupancy rates of your unit you will have to market your business economically but effectively. You may wish to consider distributing leaflets and brochures, giving full details of your facilities and rates, through Tourist Information Centres and at key locations in your area and beyond. In addition, visitors may learn of your facilities through personal referral, entries in local guidebooks, specialist Bed & Breakfast literature or media advertising. Once you are certified your premises will be placed on the www.discovernorthernireland.com website. You may wish to contact the Northern Ireland Bed & Breakfast Partnership, to benefit from the advice and expertise of members who have been in a similar business for a long time, email info@nibbp.com. Finally, Tourism Northern Ireland works closely with **Regional Tourism Partnerships** (RTPs) in Northern Ireland. The RTPs are a good first point of contact for the industry and they deliver regional specific advice to their members.

Types of Visitor

There is a broad spectrum of people who choose to stay in Bed & Breakfasts. Many visitors who could easily afford higher priced accommodation make a deliberate choice of comfortable establishments which have a home-from-home atmosphere in which to relax and chat to the host family. A friendly host, together with good quality facilities and value for money accommodation, are key elements for success in all sectors of tourism.

Environmental Consideration

Tourism Northern Ireland, in its promotion of sensible, sensitive and sustainable tourism, encourages 'good housekeeping' schemes such as recycling, energy conservation and waste minimisation.

Minimum and recommended criteria

The requirements and recommendations set out here are intended for guidance; they are not comprehensive. During an inspection you will be advised on matters not specifically detailed here, however, inspections do not cover all aspects of tourist accommodation; it is the responsibility of certified premises operators/owners to make every reasonable effort to ensure that visitors enjoy a safe and secure stay. As part of your duty of care to visitors you should remain vigilant of potential risk to visitors and of how you describe your premises in marketing and promotion.

The following list sets out minimum requirements for B&Bs under **Schedule 3 of the Categories of Tourist Establishment (Statutory Criteria) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992 and (2009 & 2011 amendments)**. It also contains Tourism Northern Ireland recommendations, in italics. All criteria should be interpreted in such a way that your guests will be impressed by the quality of your facilities.

Minimum and Recommended Criteria

This outline is not in order of priority. It goes through the requirements approximately in the sequence they will be encountered by visitors.

Tourist Signage (White on Brown): Tourist Signage in Northern Ireland is the joint responsibility of Roads Service of the Department of Regional Development and Tourism Northern Ireland. A full copy of the policy is available at www.tourismni.com (see business support). The policy is implemented on an annual basis by each local council and application forms for tourist signage are available from your local council Tourism Officer.

Advertising Signage: External advertising signage, either in the grounds of your facility or in any other public space, may require planning permission. Tourism Northern Ireland recommends that you discuss any proposed external advertising signage with your local Planning Service Office prior to erection.

Do not claim to be 'Tourism Northern Ireland Recommended' or 'Approved'; you may indicate that you have a Tourism Northern Ireland Certificate, if you wish. You should consult with Tourism Northern Ireland in relation to the wording of your sign.

Car-parking: Consider provision of parking with due regard to neighbours, traffic regulations and the fact that guests will not wish to carry baggage for long distances.

Entrance hall: This should be adequate for the reception of the number of guests. It must be well laid out and contain good quality furnishings, fittings and equipment.

Display of Certificate and Charges: Your Tourism Northern Ireland Certificate and scale of charges for accommodation must be prominently displayed, easily seen by visitors before, or immediately after, they enter. Where food other than breakfast is provided, these meals should be identified and the charge shown. If your rates vary seasonally, or if there is any condition to be satisfied (e.g. age-eligibility for children's rates), or any other charges not included in the rate, then these must be displayed. All charges should be inclusive of VAT, where applicable.

Visitors' register: As well as the name, address and dates of arrival/departure, you are legally required to record each visitor's nationality.

Many establishments keep a book of comments for completion by guests on departure to record hints, recommendations and observations helpful to future visitors.

Tourist Literature: A selection of current leaflets, brochures, maps and other literature relating to your locality should be available.

Instructions: Any house rules you wish to be observed or any other information which would be of interest to guests/potential guests should be brought to the guests' attention at the earliest opportunity, e.g. at reservation. It is also a good idea to check guests' requirements at this time as some people may suffer from allergies (i.e. pets, nuts etc.). A guest information folder is a useful way to relay information and can be provided on guests' arrival.

Structural and Safety Requirements: Your establishment should be of substantial and durable construction, structurally safe, in good repair throughout and of suitable design. It should be in good decorative order and kept clean and well maintained throughout, including outdoor areas, grounds and car parking areas.

Dining Area: The dining area must be sufficiently large to cater for the number of guests who may reasonably be expected to use it at any one time. It must also have sufficient cutlery, condiments, napkins and crockery for the number of diners who may be expected to use it at any one time.

This area must have solid tables, completely covered with a clean tablecloth, or surfaced with polished hardwood or veneer and comfortable, strong seats including high chairs (or suitably adapted chairs) for children. The ventilation must eliminate cooking smells from the kitchen. There must be carpeting or other suitable flooring and the area should be clean and in good decorative order.

Kitchen Area: The kitchen and associated service areas should be adjacent to or accessible from the dining area. It should contain facilities equipment and fittings which are of good quality and condition, constructed of easily cleaned materials and adequate for the storage, refrigeration, preparation, cooking and service of food for the number of visitors and the storage and cleaning of all utensils. The kitchen must be adequately ventilated. Provision should to be made for the speedy

disposal of waste into bins or other suitable containers which are regularly emptied. Cutlery, utensils and dinnerware should be of good quality.

Lounge Area: A B&B should have one or more lounges of adequate size for the number of guests and contain sufficient furniture, fittings and equipment of good quality and condition for the number of guests. *These facilities may be shared by the host family, for watching television etc.*

Visitors' Bedrooms: Rooms must be numbered, lettered or otherwise designated to identify them easily and should be of sufficient size to cater for the number of visitors the room is intended to hold. Each bedroom should have separate access from a corridor, and the door must be lockable. The rooms must contain furniture, fittings and equipment for sleeping and toilet purposes, and for the storage of visitors' clothing. In general, these furnishings should include: beds, complete with interior sprung mattress; a supply of clean linen, blankets or duvets and pillows; loose or built-in units comprising wardrobe or cupboards, dressing table with mirror, and drawer space for clothes; bedside chair and table; wastepaper basket; carpet, or, if the floor surface is suitable, a bedside rug and window curtains/blinds which should ensure privacy and exclude light. The room must also have proper lighting. Daily cleaning of rooms shall be carried out when visitors are resident.

Bedrooms are a vitally important area, since your guests will spend more time in them than in any other part of your premises and Tourism Northern Ireland would encourage the provision of high quality en suite facilities. Extra pillows and blankets should be made available on demand and you should provide a hospitality tray.

Bathrooms and Toilets: B&B establishments offering bedrooms which do not have en suite bathrooms must provide at least one bathroom for every 6 visitors (or proportion of 6) and one suitably located WC with wash hand basin for every 6 visitors, plus another WC for every additional 6 people (or proportion of 6). The en suite bathroom of a bedroom should contain a bath or shower, a WC and (unless one is already provided in the bedroom) a wash basin of good quality and in good condition.

Cracked, soiled or poorly installed fittings give a very bad impression. It is worth investing in high-quality fixtures, towels and equipment such as hairdryers.

All bathrooms should have plumbing in good working order to ensure a continuous supply of hot and cold running water and the disposal of waste water. They should also have an effective means of natural or mechanical ventilation. Bathrooms and toilets should be equipped with mirror, towel rails, clothes hooks, bath mat, plus an ample supply of toilet requisites, including towels, soap and toilet paper.

Hot water should be available at all reasonable times; you should have a system of water heating which copes with peak demands.

Owners' Accommodation: Sleeping accommodation, which is separate from that for visitors and clearly identified as such, must be provided for the use of the hosts, their family, and any resident staff.

Service: Other criteria, such as the need for the B&B to be under the supervision of the proprietor, and to be adequately staffed to maintain appropriate standards of service at all reasonable times, must be observed. High expectations among your customers will require the hosts to provide levels of service and attention appropriate to a modern B&B establishment. The statutory criteria relating to the need for the proprietor to be 'trained or experienced in management of a Bed & Breakfast establishment' may not be strictly enforced, at the Board's discretion, as an encouragement to new start-ups. However, hosts should make every effort to undertake training courses and gain experience as soon as possible.

Useful Websites

- Tourism Northern Ireland's website www.tourismni.com/accommodation for further copies of this document
- Tourism Northern Ireland's website www.tourismni.com/forms to apply online for certification
- Tourism Northern Ireland's website www.tourismni.com/research for facts and figures
- Tourism Northern Ireland's consumer website www.discovernorthernireland.com
- www.welcometoexcellence.com – information about customer service training programmes to assist the industry provide first class standards of service
- Divisional Planning Office www.planningni.gov.uk
- Tourist Signage Policy www.tourismni.com (see visitor servicing)
- HM Revenue & Customs www.hmrc.gov.uk (for implications of starting a business and VAT considerations)
- Music Licence requirement www.ppluk.com and www.prsformusic.com (for details on how to obtain a music licence when playing music in a public area)
- Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service www.nifrs.org
- The Health and Safety Works NI www.healthandsafetyworksni.gov.uk – A guide for small businesses to help manage health and safety in the workplace and relevant legislation
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency www.ni-environment.gov.uk/private_water.shtml - Information regarding the registration of private water supplies to holiday accommodation
- A copy of The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 can be viewed at www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1992/uksi_19920235_en_1.htm. Copies of all Tourism regulations can be obtained from The Stationery Office, Arthur Street, Belfast.
- Regional Tourism Partnerships (RTPs)

Contact details for further information

For more information/application forms for certification contact any of the following staff in the Quality and Standards Department:

Damien Murray
Sarah Sneddon

028 90 441545
028 90 441686

You can also email this department at qa@tourismni.com or write to us at our offices at **Tourism Northern Ireland, St Anne's Court, 59 North Street, Belfast, BT1 1NB**

To request a copy of this document on disc or in other accessible formats, please contact the Quality & Standards department.



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