

Accommodation: National Quality Assessment

What's it all about?

Lewes District Council is committed to promoting the area as a quality destination for UK and overseas visitors. Taking the lead from Visit Britain, the national agency for tourism, the Council only promotes accommodation that has been assessed under the UK's official National Quality Assurance Scheme (NQAS) and awarded a 1 - 5 star rating for quality and service.

Like Visit Britain and the majority of other destinations across the UK, we have adopted this policy so that the visitor can have confidence in their choices and expectations when choosing their accommodation. Only Quality Assessed accommodation is promoted through all of Visit Britain/ England's marketing and web activities and by the national Tourist Information Centre network.

Establishments that are participating in the Quality Assurance Scheme will display a sign showing their awarded stars, so visitors can be assured that the accommodation has been visited by a qualified, independent assessor from either the AA or Quality In Tourism.

The National Quality Assurance Scheme covers all type of accommodation from Hotels, Guest Accommodation, Self Catering Cottages, Caravan and Camping sites to Boat Accommodation.

Ratings made easy:

- 1 Star - Simple, practical with no frills
- 2 Star - Well presented and well run
- 3 Star - Good level of quality and comfort
- 4 Star - Excellent standard throughout
- 5 Star - Exceptional with a degree of luxury

Who decides which Star rating applies?

No matter which organisation carries out the assessment, (AA, or Quality in Tourism), the same areas are assessed. Establishments are assessed annually, either by carrying out a routine day visit or an overnight stay. On these occasions, the assessor is unknown to the establishment and they book in as a visitor would and test all of the facilities and services. A Quality score is awarded for every aspect of the experience including the comfort of the bed, the quality of the breakfast, the warmth of welcome and most importantly the cleanliness and an appropriate star is awarded against a comprehensive checklist - this is what differentiates the official National Quality Assurance Scheme from others.

What does National Quality Assessment cost?

Each organisation charges a different fee depending on the markets they target so it is entirely up to each business to decide which they feel offers the best value for money. There is an annual fee which is calculated by the number of bedrooms in an establishment and a one off joining fee is also payable.

Contact the AA and Quality In Tourism to decide which organisation offers you the best service for your business.

What does an establishment get from National Quality Assessment?

- A thorough assessment and a personal debrief by the assessor, followed by a comprehensive written report. This gives independent feedback on the business - information that might not always be available from ordinary guests.
- A 1 to 5 star rating against Visit Britain's Quality Standards
- Free Artwork featuring the star rating for use in brochures and promotional literature
- Free issues of "Feedback", the newsletter from Visit Britain for scheme participants

- Expert advice on developing your business to improve your rating and target your markets.

And promotional opportunities at home and overseas are included:

- Free promotion in the Visit Britain 'Where to Stay Guides' which generate over 3million enquiries per year.
- Free promotion with detailed listing and photography on the both the Visit Britain and Visit England websites – which attract over 28 million visitors generating 300,000 direct bookings for the industry
- Free promotion to over 4.5million customers throughout the world via Visit Britains 300+ marketing campaigns
- Free promotion to over 560 Tourist Information Centres throughout England who make in excess of 275,000 bookings a year
- Eligibility to participate in the Enjoy Sussex marketing campaigns
- Eligibility to advertise on the VisitSussex.org website

Plus

- Free advisory leaflets about tourism trends in the area
- Regional expertise via Tourism South East which has a wealth of local knowledge and marketing experience.
- International marketing expertise via Visit Britain which operates in 36 countries throughout the world.
- Advice on a range of practical issues including signage, planning issues and suppliers of quality products essential to the accommodation industry.

And finally - as the assessor stays overnight - the price of the stay is immediately repaid.

Does National Quality Assessment mean all B&Bs are the same?

No, absolutely not. The scheme recognises the diversity of England's accommodation is its' greatest strength. Cleanliness and Guest Care are the main focus of assessment. However there are some minimum standards which apply. For example research showed most visitors expect a single bed to be 3' in width not 2'6", and a double to be minimum 4'6" and so these are minimum requirements. The Quality Indicators used represent typical expectations. They are neither definitive nor exhaustive and will evolve over time as expectations continue to grow.

So why does Lewes District Council support National Quality Standards?

Visitor expectations are growing; they don't want disappointments and are quicker to complain when things are unsatisfactory. People also tell their friends and relatives what experience they have had. It may not even be the establishment's fault that a complaint was received. For example, a couple seeking a special anniversary weekend away who without knowing, booked a budget establishment rather than a very good one. Using the National Quality Assurance Scheme they could see clearly which establishments are 4 or 5 Stars and therefore avoid their disappointing visit - and the Lewes District avoids a bad reputation.

In cases where there is a visitor complaint - the National Quality Assurance Scheme has a mechanism in place to investigate and take whatever action is necessary. The District Council tourism staff do not have to play judge and jury with local businesses.

Some people put huge amounts of time and energy into their establishments - National Quality Assurance recognises and rewards these achievements for all to see.

Gold and Silver Awards

Gold and Silver Awards are given to establishments that not only achieve the overall levels of quality within their Star rating, but also reach the highest levels of quality in specific areas, identified by potential guests as being really important to them. The awards reflect the quality of comfort and cleanliness you will find in bedrooms and bathrooms as well as the quality of service you will enjoy throughout your stay.