

Operating safely is fundamental to being a responsible business and Covid-19 has underlined the importance of our safe and secure promise.



Unite is home to 76,000 students. For many, this is their first time living away from home. This year our brand promise of being 'Safe and Secure' has been more important than ever as students, our people and the communities we operate in faced the unique challenge of living and working in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Covid-19 health and safety has been a key priority in 2020 with a focus not only on social distancing and other measures to prevent and control the spread of the virus but also on student and employee wellbeing. Reflecting the measures we had taken, Unite was recognised as the first student accommodation provider to have its Covid secure status accredited by the British Safety Council (BSC). We could not have achieved this without the resilience and agility of our teams whilst working in the very challenging Covid-19 environment. Further information on our Covid-19 response is detailed in this Committee report.

HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE CONTINUED

Health & Safety Committee Members

Professor Sir Steve Smith
Chair of the Health & Safety Committee

Richard Smith
Chief Executive Officer

Dame Shirley Pearce
Non-Executive Director

Elizabeth McMeikan
Senior Independent Director

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Non-Executive Director

Number of Meetings

3

Attendance

100%

Our focus on safety is not limited to Covid-19. Building on our BSC 5-star rating achieved in 2019, Unite was honoured to receive the BSC Sword of Honour in 2020 for excellence in the management of occupational health and safety.

Fire safety remains a key safety priority and through 2020 we continued to engage with our primary authority, the Avon Fire and Rescue Service, and local fire services, especially conscious that students' lives were changing as they lived with us through the pandemic. All of our properties have been confirmed as safe to operate by independent fire safety experts, reflecting a wide range of fire safety measures across our portfolio as well as the special measures put in place at the affected buildings, including increased building patrols by staff, additional alarm measures and sprinklers. Cladding also remains a priority and we continue to work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to ensure our properties comply with emerging guidelines.

During 2020, and in accordance with the Government's Building Safety Advice of 20 January 2020, we undertook a review of the use of High-Pressure Laminate (HPL) cladding on our properties. We have identified 19 properties with HPL across our estate, all but three of which are greater than 18 metres in height. Having removed Aluminium Composite Materials (ACM) cladding from our building, we will continue to follow our values of doing what's right and will now remove HPL cladding where it fails to meet regulations. We are currently carrying out replacement of properties with HPL cladding, with activity prioritised according to our risk assessments, starting with those over 18 metres in height. The cost of replacing the HPL cladding is expected to be £79.9 million (Unite share: £33.8 million), which will be incurred over the next 12 to 36 months

During 2020, we continued to expand and regionalise our Health and Safety team, allowing closer and more 'on the ground' support for our Operations teams helping them deliver our Safe and Secure brand promise. This also allowed our strengthened regional teams to better support the successful integration with Liberty Living, underlining the safety of our teams and customers as our key priority.

Our focus for 2021 remains on providing absolute confidence to our customers, employees, visitors and parents/guardians on the safety of our properties and our workplace. This includes working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure our properties comply with emerging guidelines. We will also concentrate on providing clear information and education to our customers on how they can keep themselves safe and secure in their homes.

Health and Safety Committee meetings

The Health and Safety Committee met three times during the year and attendance at those meetings is shown on page 99.

Covid-19 – 2020/2021

- Covid-19 Secure Workplace – Unite was the first student accommodation provider to be recognised with the British Safety Council ‘Covid Secure Workplace’ assurance. We have implemented subsequent controls which are being reviewed and updated regularly to ensure adherence to ongoing Government guidance.
- Adapting to Covid-19 – we adapted and created new policies and operating practices such as a new Clean+ Property Standard outlining our cleaning, quality and safety standards, and a business-wide Covid-19 Risk Assessment. We have also produced a Covid Secure Contractor Guidance Document for our contractors and third parties. This additional guidance has allowed us to continue with key activities including construction work, essential maintenance, and upgrades.
- Working From Home – to ensure those working from home have appropriate measures and equipment in place to safely carry out their day-to-day activities, we created an online DSE Assessment and e-Learning in line with Covid-19 guidance. Office equipment has been provided to those employees identified as requiring additional equipment.
- Getting ready for academic year 2020/21 – our teams worked tirelessly through the Covid-19 pandemic to clean rooms, common areas and kitchens over the summer of 2020 to get our properties ready for the academic year 2020/2021 intake. Our MyUnite app and operating platform PRISM has helped facilitate digital interactions between our teams and students with bookings, maintenance requests, support for self-isolating students, managing arrivals and check-ins.
- Student welfare – we have worked closely with our University partners to increase provision and access to wellbeing and mental health support during the pandemic, including online welfare checks, a pilot peer to peer scheme as well as support for those shielding and self-isolating.
- Investment in equipment – we made key investments in equipment to help us control Covid-19, these include: temperature ray guns, Purifog (chemical fogging) machines, PPE, screens, floor markings etc.

Highlights and achievements from 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic meant readjusting our H&S focus for the year, making sure we remain Covid secure whilst still ensuring the safety of our teams at work and customers living with us. In addition, we rolled out the following initiatives:

- Safe & Secure Brand Proposition – we have created and rolled out a Safe & Secure Brand Proposition which explains how we keep our customers and teams safe. This has been especially important for our teams as it has given them the information and tools to have conversations with students, parents, guardians and University partners about the safety and security measures that we have in place to ensure a safe place to live.
- Health and Safety training – we have delivered 40 training courses to over 1,300 employees on Health, Safety, Security, Fire and Wellbeing. Alongside this, we continued our mandatory e-learning modules for all employees. We also received Senior Leadership Health and Safety training from the British Safety Council.
- Health and Safety Software – we have procured a new H&S Software System which we will roll out to the business in Q2 2021. The software is a market-leading SAS (Software as a Service) system and reduces the need for multiple, complex systems for reporting on safety incident, inspections and audits. This will bring us greater insight into our safety information and data and help us be better, reflecting one of our values Raising the Bar Together.
- Working at Height Review – we completed our full review of Working at Height, one of our ‘Top 5 Safety Risks’. Following this review, we now work in partnership with Faithful and Gould for all safety related information before any high-risk working at height.

HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE CONTINUED

British Safety Council (BCS) audits

Following our 5-star audit achievement last year, the BSC has now awarded us the prestigious 'Sword of Honour'. The Sword of Honour is reserved for elite organisations that have clearly demonstrated excellence in the management of occupational health, safety and environmental risk. Unite is one of only 61 organisations globally who have achieved this accolade.

Top-five safety focus areas will continue into 2020/2021

Following the completion of our Working at Height safety review, we have revised our Top 5 Safety Risks by replacing Working at Height with violence and assault against our team members in the workplace. Covid-19 has unfortunately exacerbated the prevalence of violence against our team members and we are increasing our focus on measures to protect our frontline teams.

-  Fire safety
-  Electrical safety
-  Contractor safety
-  Driving for work
-  Violence and assault against our team members in the workplace

Incidents

There were 12 RIDDOR reportable accidents in 2020. Five of these were Covid-19 incidents reported under the category 'Disease' in properties in Manchester and Liverpool during October 2020. They occurred whilst Public Health England supported both cities through initial unprecedented outbreaks of Covid-19 in student accommodation in these cities. Three of the RIDDOR accidents related to slip and trip, one related to manual handling, one related to contact with machinery, one related to being caught/carried away in something and one related to being struck against something. All incidents have been comprehensively investigated, with preventative measures put in place to prevent a reoccurrence and lessons learned communicated.

The introduction of our new H&S Software system and its data analytics will help provide us clearer insight which will assist in the trending and monitoring of safety incidents data going forward with a focus on near miss reporting as a leading indicator of potential areas of risk.

Safety in our Development Sites

In our development activity, there were three RIDDOR reportable injuries and 50 minor incidents in 2020. This represents good safety performance against the industry norm which is especially pleasing with the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic. This performance is within our Unite internal benchmarks – as follows:

Property	Total Hours Worked	Non-reportable Incidents	Reportable Incidents
Artisan Heights	325,472	16	0
White Rose View Leeds	762,759	14	2
White Rose View House	545,590	15	1
Middlesex Street	53,182	3	0
BRI Bristol	30,520	2	0
Total	1,717,523	50	3

Incidents	KPI ¹	Benchmark
3 RIDDOR	0.17	0.30
50 Minor	0.29	5.00

¹ KPI calculated as: No of incidents worked x 100,000 hours / hours worked

Mental health and wellbeing

We launched our employee wellbeing strategy and training in September 2020 starting with 'Train the Trainer' sessions for our nominated Wellbeing champions across the business.

'The Healthy Work Company' was appointed our new external specialist partner for this important initiative and they have rolled out training to the operational leadership team. We are also providing professional counselling support for any team members who require it following a Covid-19 outbreak at our properties as it is recognised that the current 'post-incident' service currently on offer from our Employee Assistance Programme would be beneficial in these circumstances.

We have released our updated Flexible Working Policy, Working from Home Guidelines and home working DSE, all of which have been updated in line with the latest Government restrictions. The use of our head offices in Bristol (South Quay House) and London (Swan House) will continue to be on a strictly prioritised basis and in line with Government restrictions, where team members have highlighted a welfare need or do not have an adequate DSE set-up/space at home.

Property development

Despite the Covid-19 disruption and lockdown restrictions, we made progress in our development pipeline during 2020 and delivered three buildings for the 2020/21 academic year. Throughout the pandemic, we worked closely with our contractors to ensure our sites were safe to operate and introduced various measures such as reducing the number of operatives on site to help social distancing. We have also worked closely with our supply chain to mitigate delays in product and material delivery to our development sites. With testing becoming more available, we now provide all construction operatives and management twice weekly onsite tests.

In addition to our Covid-19 safety focus and delivering schemes in a uniquely challenging environment, we also focused on:

- Wellbeing – started an operative wellbeing programme through external specialists to promote the support of British Safety Council audit recommendations implemented across developments and supply chain improving the way we deliver our developments
- Reporting – overhaul of our management KPIs and reporting, tracking trends, instigating target audits and using monthly improvement drives
- Appointment of a new H&S CDM / Clients Rep – Faithful+Gould Limited appointed to drive consistency and improvement across all development and estates projects
- Integration of project delivery – bringing a unified approach to the delivery of all construction across Estates, refurbishment, development and asset management
- Review and completion of BSC Construction audit actions – one of the key actions from the audit was on management of wellbeing on development sites. We have engaged with an external specialist to help develop a strategy and provide mental health and counselling support to contractors and their sub-contractors.
- Continuing to deliver year-on-year improvement in our H&S KPIs across all our development sites

Professor Steve Smith

Chair – Health and Safety Committee

16 March 2021