

14 August 2020



Experiment in  
International  
Living UK

## Update on COVID-19: coming out of lockdown

As lockdown restrictions ease, we are taking a careful approach as we start to run our programmes and move a step closer to our goal of running all EIL UK activities - in one way or another - by the end of the year.

The impact of COVID-19 has been felt worldwide and, like everyone else, we've had to make significant changes to how our programmes operate. We've created new working protocols and adapted our programmes to run differently.

For example, we found digital solutions that made it possible to move our training courses on-line so that we could continue to train the international volunteers who support around 100 community organisations in the UK. These changes have proved to be very successful, and our staff have done a marvellous job in rising to new challenges and finding creative solutions whilst working from home.

Some of our intercultural learning programmes, such as homestays, will be up and running this Autumn, others such as cultural education groups will have to wait a little longer. Everything we do now takes more time and requires extra thought about how to do it safely. This involves the introduction of new procedures and additional health and safety measures, such as PPE.

It is impossible to list all of the many areas we are working on, but examples of the new requirements include the introduction of testing participants before they leave for the UK and securing their agreement to adopt extra safety measures before and while they are on the programme. For example, high school students must observe strict 2m social distancing and avoid socialising for a minimum of 2 weeks before they travel to the UK. Our aim is for everyone involved in EIL programmes to be able to enjoy the experience, knowing that plans are in place and everyone is doing their part to minimise the risk of spreading or catching Coronavirus.

As lockdown eases, we are receiving applications from international students for day visits and weekend visits along with requests for individual homestays. Students are keen to take part in our High School Programme too, as their families have been saving for years to send them to the UK for their study abroad experience.

For now, we can only accept applications from students from a few countries with very low rates of infection or from students who have already been in the UK for a few months. As soon as schools confirm they are willing and able (thinking of how many difficulties they face in returning to teaching) to accept our international students, we are ready to press 'go' on our High School Programme.

Applications for programmes starting in 2021, including the High School Programme 2021-22, are starting to come in earlier than usual. But before we can return to pre-COVID-19 programme participant numbers, we have more work to do with our school and university partners, Local Coordinators and Regional Organisers and, in particular, with our host families so that everyone understands how the changed programmes will operate in what we are calling the 'new world'.

All being well, we plan to reopen our offices in September so that we can support programmes during normal office hours as usual. The team are looking forward to seeing each other in person as many of us have not seen colleagues for 5 months. In the meantime, if you have left a message on our office telephone number, please be aware that it may take us a little longer than usual to answer you because the office is staffed part-time at present. Thank you for your patience.

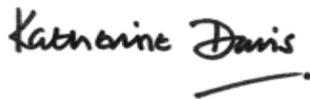
We are pleased to end this update with two pieces of positive news:

One of the biggest surprises in lockdown has been the number of new families contacting us to enquire about joining our community of wonderful hosts and becoming a registered EIL host family. And we have also been surprised at the number of requests from our existing hosts who are eager to support our work. It boosted our spirits no end that, even at such a difficult time, people were thinking about a time when they could welcome students, volunteers and others into their homes.

Our next update will contain exciting news about that expansion of one of our programmes that offers international students the opportunity to experience and enjoy homestays whilst studying in the UK.

EIL UK's Trustees join the EIL staff and volunteer team in thanking you for your interest in taking part in our programmes and for your continued support for our charity and enthusiasm for working with us in these difficult times. With your help and involvement, we can continue to provide opportunities for youth groups, students, adults and hosts to learn about each other's cultures through developing international friendships and understanding.

Looking ahead to 2021, we hope you and your family and friends across the world remain safe and well and that it will be possible to come together in person, safely, to celebrate EIL UK's 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.



Katherine Davis  
Chief Executive  
EIL UK

[info@eiluk.org](mailto:info@eiluk.org)