



Get London Graded - the answers to frequently asked questions

What is Get London Graded?

Get London Graded is the LDA's programme to help ungraded accommodation including hotels, B&Bs, serviced apartments, self catering, hostels and campus properties in the capital become star rated in the national quality grading scheme run by VisitBritain and the AA.

The long term goal of the programme is to help businesses improve their quality and business performance and to help raise the standards of some of the accommodation in the capital. The starting point is to have a visit from a quality advisor.

What does a visit from a quality advisor mean?

If you own or manage any ungraded accommodation and are seeking to improve your business performance, then the LDA will arrange for you to receive a free visit from one of our advisors.

The visit is designed to help you understand:

- Why quality and business performance are linked together
- What improvements could be right for your business
- The simple things that can make a difference to your guests
- The marketing opportunities that a star rating from either the AA or VisitBritain brings to your business.
- How to identify the most appropriate star level for your business
- How to access the subsidised assessment fees (£400 over 3 years)

Initial visits will last between three and four hours. Following the visit the advisor will provide you with a written report with suggested options and quality guidance.

Please note that eligibility is restricted by State Aid rules and the programme is not available to international chain hotels.

What will I pay and how does the subsidy work?

The LDA business support programme is offering £400 subsidy over three years for ungraded businesses to join either the AA or VisitBritain quality schemes. This equates to £250 in year one and £150 in year two with the establishment paying the full rate in year three. All recipients also benefit from a free workshop of their choice.

The subsidy is open to accommodation businesses within the 33 London Boroughs that are not yet in one of the grading schemes.

The subsidy is not available to premises already in the grading scheme, have been graded within the last 12 months, that are part of a multi national hotel chain, or that have already exceeded the state aid limits for individual businesses.

The fees for participation with the AA and VisitBritain vary and both offer varying marketing opportunities. Our advisor can help you with identifying the most appropriate star rating for your business and outline the benefits and costs when they visit.

The costs, excluding subsidies, range from £182 for a small B&B to £2115 for a 5 star hotel in the centre of London. This can be reduced, in year one, to £125 for a small B&B and £1865 for a 5 star hotel. Your LDA subsidy is taken off before you pay your final amount, so you don't have to claim it back. In addition, you will receive the revenue from the assessor who pays to stay with you!

Why do I need a star rating?

Grading in this country is not statutory and it is up to individual businesses whether to become star rated. Currently approximately 50% of businesses in England participate in the grading scheme run by the AA or VisitBritain, although London is below this national average at 33% (May 2007).

- VisitBritain, which now only promotes graded accommodation, has set the target of encouraging 80% of properties to become graded by 2010.
- In addition to VisitBritain, more and more local authorities and Destination Marketing Partnerships (DMPs) are committing to promoting 'assessed only' ie graded only properties.
- Star rated businesses have access to a range of high profile advertising, campaigns and promotional opportunities that are denied to ungraded properties. Please see the pdfs on the LDA website which outline the marketing benefits to graded accommodation from the VisitBritain and AA schemes.
- Research shows that, increasingly, consumers are aware of the grading schemes and whether or not a property is star rated has an impact on their booking decisions.
- Businesses receive a large amount of business support when they decide to go for grading. The grading process also provides an independent benchmark, which many businesses find extremely useful as a way of monitoring how well they are doing against their competitors.

At the end of these notes there are a number of quotes from London accommodation establishments on why they decided to go for grading and the benefits that it brings them.

Is there a difference between VisitBritain and the AA?

VisitBritain and the AA, along with VisitScotland and Visit Wales, have entered into a common agreement for the grading of serviced and self catering accommodation in Great Britain. This means that the quality standards will be the same whichever organisation assesses you and the symbols, ie 1 to 5 stars, will be the same. (Of

course, your final rating represents the quality of your service, facilities and physical standards.)

Each organisation offers its own marketing benefits that can be discussed at the time of your personal visit from an LDA advisor or you can call free phone 0800 0778082 or log onto www.lda.gov.uk/tourism

Is there help in making my business more environmentally friendly?

We can arrange for an advisor from the LDA's programme Green Tourism for London to visit you to talk about ways in which you can save money and help care for the environment through energy and resource management.

More information about the scheme and the subsidies available to join this programme can be seen on www.lda.gov.uk/greentourism. Please note that you have to be graded (star rated) to be eligible to join Green Tourism for London.

How long does it take for assessment after I have applied for a star rating?

Once you have sent in the application form you will need to allow up to 10 weeks before being assessed, by either the AA or VisitBritain

Will I be able to be in the 2009 guides for the AA or VisitBritain?

Both organisations sign off their guides in June for the following year. Each organisation offers different deals. However if you pay your annual assessment fee now at today's rates with either organisation, there will be no more to pay until the next assessment in 2010 (effectively offering you 18 months for one year of fees).

Do we have to remove the word 'Hotel' if we are Guest Accommodation?

Since January 2006 any establishment entering the scheme in the 'Guest Accommodation' category is not permitted to have the word 'hotel' in their business name. All participants in the scheme on January 2006 have two years (until January 2008) to change their business name or be assessed under the hotel standard. Further guidance on use of the word 'hotel' on websites, canopies and signs can be given at the time of your visit.

What happens if you advise me that I do not meet the minimum standards for a star rating?

The LDA offers businesses up to three days free consultancy advice to help businesses achieve the minimum standards for the required star rating. We also offer advice in other areas of your business operation eg improving accessibility, business planning and marketing. This may help you achieve the standards required.

What is Quality in Tourism?

Quality in Tourism is a company contracted by VisitBritain to deliver the assessments on its behalf. The branding for the scheme is that of VisitBritain and signage and marketing reflects this.

I have seen diamonds on some signs. What do they mean?

Diamonds were the symbols used to represent the Guest Accommodation category. These are now being phased out and replaced by stars.

What is a designator and what does it mean?

Within the main categories a number of designators are used to give more detail about the type and style of the product. For example within Guest Accommodation category you can find the B&B and guesthouse designators.

The following designators are being applied:

Serviced accommodation

1. Hotel Categories:

- **Hotels** have a minimum of six bedrooms, but more likely to have 20+ rooms.
- **Small Hotels** have a maximum of 20 bedrooms and likely to be more personally run.
- **Country House Hotels** have ample grounds or gardens, in a rural or semi rural location, with emphasis on peace and quiet.
- **Town House Hotels** are in a city/town centre location and are of high quality with a distinctive style. High ratio of staff to guests.
- **Metro Hotels** are found in city/town centres, offering full hotel services, but no dinner. Will be within easy walking distance of a range of places to eat.
- **Budget Hotels** are part of a chain of branded hotels offering clean and comfortable en suite facilities, 24 hour reservations and a consistent level of facilities. They are not awarded a star rating.

2. Guest Accommodation categories:

Guest Accommodation is the category which encompasses anything from one-room bed and breakfasts to the larger places found in our coastal resorts, which may offer dinner and may be licensed.

- **Bed and Breakfasts** accommodate no more than six people. It's like staying as a special guest in someone's home.
- **Farmhouses** offer bed and breakfast and sometimes dinner, always on a farm.
- **Guest Houses** tend to have more than three rooms and may offer dinner to their guests. Some may be licensed.
- **Restaurants with Rooms** are just that. The restaurant is the main business and they will be licensed. They generally offer a small number of bedrooms with all the facilities you would expect and breakfast.
- **Inns** are pubs with rooms which serve food in the evenings, as well as breakfast.

3. Self-catering Accommodation – operated by VB, VS and VW only

- Serviced Apartments
- Self catering

Our rooms are smaller than recommended size. Can we still apply?

The room sizes outlined in the standards are a guide and as long as there is adequate space for movement and furnishings and fittings can be reached and opened without movement of furniture, it would be generally considered fit for purpose. There should be minimum headroom of 6 foot. Sloping eaves would be assessed on an individual basis. VB and AA will give advice if room sizes or heights are restricted due to listed building status,

What is a VisitBritain Gold or Silver Award?

Gold and Silver Awards indicate of exceptional quality. Businesses have to consistently demonstrate high quality, especially in key areas identified by consumers as being important. High scores need to be achieved in the following areas:

In guest accommodation:

- Housekeeping
- Hospitality
- Bedrooms
- Bathrooms
- Breakfast

And for hotels:

- Housekeeping
- Hospitality
- Service
- Bedrooms
- Bathrooms
- Food

Judged on an overnight assessment, an assessor uses his or her experience and benchmarking knowledge to recognise excellent and exceptional standards. Silver is awarded to establishments that outperform their quality rating and Gold represents ‘the best of the best’.

Hotels and guest accommodation at all star levels can achieve awards. For example, a bed and breakfast establishment or guesthouse may achieve a two - or three-star level due to the absence of washbasins in bedrooms or insufficient en suite bathrooms, but may have exceptional quality standards in all the key areas. VisitBritain assessors will be pleased to advise owners who are keen to retain their awards or gain one for the first time.

What are AA Inspectors’ Choice/Red Star Awards?

The AA identifies the best hotels in each star rating level with the award “Inspectors’ Choice”. These are promoted in the AA Guides and on the AA web site with *red* stars (as opposed to the regular black stars). There are around 200 hotels across the UK with this award - out of 4000 recognised AA hotels.

What is the AA “Highly Commended” award?

The AA identifies the best guest accommodation at three, four and five stars with the award “Highly Commended”. These are promoted in the AA Guides and on the AA web site with *yellow* stars (as opposed to the regular black stars). There are around 400 guest accommodation establishments across the UK with this award - out of 4000 recognised AA guest accommodation.

What are AA Rosettes?

The AA identifies excellent cuisine in hotel and stand-alone restaurants with AA Rosette Awards from five AA Rosettes (the highest award) to one AA Rosette. There are around 2000 restaurants with AA Rosette awards across the UK. Most have 1 and 2 AA Rosettes. Only around 150 have three or more AA Rosettes.

Read about the experience of four properties in London.

The Commodore is a privately owned 79-bedroom hotel in Bayswater, applying for 4 stars with the AA.

'We were rated as 3 stars until 2000 but that lapsed. Now we have had a major refurbishment and are going for 4 stars with the AA. We will benefit from being monitored and having regular inspections. If we've any shortfalls we'll put them right. We won't get our grading and then let things lapse. We're serious about our business and we've invested a lot of money in the property and we don't want it to go to waste.

I think the impact for guests is reassurance. We will have 4 stars officially and that's what visitors expect. If you don't deliver then you have to put it right. So I think it keeps everyone on their toes.

Being graded is a great opportunity for us to see where we stand, where we think we stand and where the professionals put us. At the end of the day it will benefit everybody.'

Sean Harte, General Manager, Commodore Hotel

The Clarendon Hotel in Greenwich has been graded by VisitBritain for 25 years and has just upgraded from a 2 star to a 3 star

'We like being graded because it's a great management tool for the hotel. This year we upgraded from a 2 star to a 3 star hotel and VisitBritain helped us get there, working with us to make the improvements. It's not just one visit and that's it.

Being graded is a process that involves everybody in the hotel. The staff are brought along with it too, becoming quite involved in their areas. It's like a journey for all of us.'

Ken Milton, General Manager, The Clarendon Hotel

The Lord Milner is a townhouse in Belgravia which offers bed and breakfast and is applying for 5 stars in the Guest Accommodation category with VisitBritain

'We have been trading for one year now which has given us time to fine-tune the guest facilities and we now feel confident in applying for 5 stars. Having familiarised ourselves with the VisitBritain criteria, this has really concentrated our minds on the level of detail required.

We know that there is a demand for highly individual boutique accommodation in London and by achieving a high grading, we will demonstrate that even B+B's can be 4 and 5 star quality without compromise. This also acts as a reassurance to the guest when deciding on where to stay in London. We are represented on lots of websites but www.visitbritain.org is recognised as the gateway website for anyone visiting the UK. It is respected; its content is highly informative and it has huge global reach.'

Amber Engelbrecht, Proprietor, The Lord Milner

The Railway Tavern is a family owned pub opposite the new Channel Tunnel rail link in Stratford. It recently added 9 rooms and is aiming for 2 or 3 star guest accommodation.

'You've got to be on the ball all the time. I know within Stratford we're getting more applications coming through for new hotels. If I want to keep my high occupancy levels, I've got to keep my standards up all the time.

I am going for a star rating because we've got the eyes of the world on us in the next five years. And people from abroad and the UK do look at star ratings. Having them is having a feather in my cap.'

Jan Dooner, Owner, Railway Tavern Hotel

LiveTourism is the specialist quality and accessibility consultancy that has been appointed by the LDA to deliver the Get London Graded programme. For more information please email Mandy Lane, Director, on mandy@live-tourism.co.uk or call 0800 077 8082.