



DEATH TRAP OR DEAD GOOD?

A GUIDE TO FLAT HUNTING IN GLASGOW



introduction



Finding suitable accommodation is not always easy, and Glasgow holds many choices for students. However, you could face problems unless you know something about your rights and responsibilities as a tenant.

The SRC has produced this leaflet to guide you through some of the difficulties of renting accommodation. You can get more information and advice by visiting the SRC Advice Centre, in the John McIntyre Building. You can also email advice@src.gla.ac.uk.

Please note that all the information in this guide is accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of writing. However, the SRC cannot accept responsibility for decisions made based on this information.

What To Look Out For

Rent

It is a good idea to work out what you can afford to spend on rent, and stick to this. Most adverts will specify rent monthly, abbreviated to pcm (per calendar month). If rent is weekly, remember that you need to adjust this (multiply by 52 and divide by 12) to get the equivalent monthly rate.

Landlord Licence

All landlords letting properties in the private sector must be registered with the local council. This scheme ensures that disreputable landlords can be removed from the market, while tenants and neighbours can be protected from the consequences of antisocial behaviour and mismanaged properties.

You can check if your landlord is registered online – see contact list (page 8).

HMO Licence

An HMO is a House in Multiple Occupancy, which is a property where three or more unrelated people live, using shared facilities.

For a landlord to operate an HMO, the property must be licensed with the local council. The licensing conditions are strict, and include, for example, the need to have clear fire escape routes, safe gas and electrical appliances, adequately sized rooms, and a telephone landline installed. These regulations are there to protect tenants and ensure that the property is safe for habitation.

The licence should be prominently displayed in the property. If you suspect a property is not registered (which is a criminal offence on the part of the landlord) or a landlord has breached the terms of the licence, you can get help from the SRC Advice Centre or directly from the Council's HMO unit.



Where To Look

University Accommodation Office

They run the Private Accommodation Database (PAD), which can be accessed on-line at: <http://www.accom.gla.ac.uk/pad/>

You can also pick up a copy of the PAD Guide at the Accommodation Office.

Newspapers

Evening Times, The Herald, Sunday Herald.

Noticeboards

Newsagents, supermarkets and some small shops carry advertisements. These may not be as reputable as PAD. Also check the boards in the SRC, QMU and GUU.

Letting Agents

Many in the West End or to be found online. These may charge a fee for finding places but it is unlawful for them to do this until you have accepted the accommodation.

Online

The SRC run a flatshare service, where you can apply for single rooms or entire flats, or advertise a vacancy.

www.glasgowstudent.net/services/flatshare/

Viewing Accommodation

Never accept a flat without going to see it and, if you can, take someone with you who has experience of renting. Before you go draw up a checklist of the things you want to know about, or use the one provided on the back of this booklet.

You are the one who will be paying the rent so you have a right to make sure the place is suitable, in good condition and, above all, safe. Do not pay a deposit for a flat on the promise that repairs will be carried out; either wait until the work has been done before accepting it or ask for written assurance that it will have been completed by the date your tenancy starts.

accepting a tenancy

Your Lease

A lease (tenancy agreement) is the legally binding contract you make with the landlord to rent the flat and s/he is not allowed to charge you for drawing up the document. Tenancy agreements cannot overrule your basic tenancy rights stated in law, but can add to them.

Read the agreement carefully – Make sure there are no terms and conditions that you would not want to accept. Sometimes a landlord will agree to change a lease so, if there is anything you do not like, ask if it can be changed or removed.

Check what the lease says about responsibility for repairs – Your landlord is obliged to keep the property wind and watertight. It is common for the tenant to be responsible for minor repairs and decoration. Responsibility for repairs should be set out in the tenancy agreement, but the landlord cannot include conditions which breach his/her legal responsibilities.

Understand exactly what you are signing (or agreeing to, as an oral agreement is also binding). If you are unsure about a written lease ask if you can take it away and then have it checked. **Make sure you are given a copy of the signed lease.**

Know your tenancy agreement – Joint tenancy is the most likely form of tenancy, where all the tenants' names are listed in the lease, everyone has to sign it and there is a collective responsibility for the rent. This means that if one or more people fail to pay their share, or leave early, the other tenants are liable for the full amount between them. You need to be sure you can trust your flatmates.

All tenants names should be on the lease – if a landlord does not want this, it might be

a ploy by the landlord to avoid having to get an HMO licence. This avoidance is an offence, and you should not accept the tenancy.

Deposit

Most landlords ask for a deposit to cover any damage to the property and its contents or to cover any unpaid bills for which they could become liable. The amount asked for is often equivalent to a month's rent. The deposit remains your money and should be recovered, by court action if necessary, at the termination of the lease, provided that all the bills have been paid and no damage has been done to the flat. You will probably be asked to pay one month's rent in advance.

Type of tenancy

An **assured tenancy** gives you security of tenure which means that when your tenancy comes to an end you do not have to move out. If your landlord wants you to leave s/he will have to go to court for a repossession order and s/he will only be granted this in certain circumstances.

A **short assured tenancy** is a special type of tenancy that allows a landlord to repossess a house/flat s/he has let. The tenancy must be for at least 6 months and before you sign any agreement you must be given a special notice (an AT5) that makes it clear that what is being offered is a short assured tenancy.

If you have a resident landlord you should seek advice about your rights.

Receipts

Always get signed, dated receipts which clearly state what payments are for.

Inventory

You should get a written list of furniture, fittings and equipment with the lease. Make sure you check these with the landlord to



confirm the number and condition of items.

If there is no inventory you should make your own. Draw up a list of all the contents, from beds down to cutlery, and record the condition of each item. You should then ask the landlord to check, sign and date it. You should not sign an inventory that lists items that have been promised: wait until you receive them.

It is also a good idea to take digital photos of the condition of the flat and furnishings when you move in.

Repairs

The landlord is responsible for maintaining the property in a habitable condition and for keeping installations for supplying heating, water, gas and electricity in proper working order. Your lease will make clear if s/he has responsibility for other repairs.

Obviously s/he cannot carry out repairs unless s/he knows there is a problem so you

have a duty to inform him/her of defects. Requests for repairs should always be put in writing and a copy kept of all letters. If you have had to phone because the problem was urgent, follow the call with a letter.

Where serious problems occur which make the flat uninhabitable it may be necessary to contact the Council (see contacts, p8).

Rent

The best way to pay rent is by standing order. If your landlord insists on cash or cheque, make sure you get a receipt when you hand over the money and never leave cash for someone to collect – if it goes missing you have no proof of payment. If you pay weekly your landlord must provide a rent book.

If for some reason your landlord fails to collect the rent regularly do not assume that you are not going to have to pay later (people have done this!). Keep the rent money in a separate account so that you will not be tempted to spend it.

after you have moved in

Safety

An HMO licensed flat will have smoke alarms and provision for escape in case of fire. If you move into a flat which does not need a licence and there are no smoke alarms ask your landlord to fit them, or ask his permission to fit your own.

Fuel bills

The supply of gas or electricity may be in the landlord's name, but it is more likely that a landlord will want you to have direct responsibility for the fuel supply. The fuel companies will probably only accept one name on the application form and that person will receive the bills. Make sure that you have a firm and sensible arrangement for paying these bills with your flatmates.

Even if you have arranged for the fuel companies to come and read the meters it is advisable to take readings yourself and to make a note of the date they are taken. If you are paying your landlord for the fuel make sure s/he reads the meters with you at the beginning and end of your tenancy.

Gas Safety

If there are any gas appliances ask to see the certificate of inspection. They must be checked every 12 months by a CORGI registered installer and your landlord is legally obliged to display the gas safety certificate somewhere within the flat. If the landlord cannot produce a record of inspection you should inform the HMO Unit or contact the HSE Gas Safety Advice Line on 0800 300 363.

Be aware of the signs that mean gas appliances are not working properly, listed at www.hse.gov.uk/gas. Only a firm registered with CORGI (Council for Registered Gas Installers) can legally work on gas appliances- visit their website at www.trustcorgi.com for

details. If you have any doubts about the safety of an appliance ask the HMO Unit to come and inspect it. If you suspect a gas leak call National Gas Emergency Service immediately on 0800 111 999.

It is a good idea to have a carbon monoxide (CO) detector as a back-up precaution, but this is not a substitute for proper maintenance.

TV licence

If you have a joint tenancy agreement you only need one TV licence for the flat, irrespective of the number of TV sets. If you have separate tenancy agreements there must be one licence for each set. It is the user's responsibility to ensure that one is obtained, as you could be fined £1,000 for using a set without a licence.

Council Tax

If all the people in your flat are on full-time courses the property will be exempt and you will not have to pay. The University will provide a certificate for you to give to the Council Tax Office. If you are not in this situation, seek advice as the rules are complicated.

Insurance

Your landlord is responsible for insuring the property but this will not cover your possessions. Accidents and burglaries do happen so it is sensible to take out insurance as soon as you move in. Contact several insurance companies for quotations, and look for insurance that includes personal liability cover for injury to others or damage for their property. This will protect you against claims arising from your negligence as a tenant, for example damage from water leaks or broken furniture. Before completing a proposal form ask to see a specimen copy of the full policy document.



Responsibilities

By signing a lease you have entered into a contract with your landlord and you should respect the terms of the lease, look after the property and be considerate towards your neighbours.

Eviction

Generally, landlords cannot evict tenants without going to court and getting an order for repossession – but seek advice if you have a resident landlord. It is usually a criminal offence for a landlord to try to remove his tenants by changing locks, cutting off fuel supplies or using threatening behaviour. If you think you are about to be evicted seek advice or, in an emergency, call the police.

Ending a Lease Early

Many leases are for a period of a year and at least 40 days written notice must be given to bring the tenancy to an end. If you want to leave before the end of the fixed period you should approach your landlord and try to

negotiate an early release. He may be quite agreeable to you finding a replacement tenant but you should never do this without his permission. If he is uncooperative and you decide to leave you will probably lose your deposit.

The landlord should try to re-let the flat as soon as possible but could claim rent from you for the time between you leaving and another tenant taking over.

Leaving

Make sure your inventory is checked, and read all the meters before you leave – preferably with the landlord.

Always leave your accommodation in a clean and tidy condition – you may find yourself with a hefty bill for cleaning or redecorating, or even deductions from your deposit if the flat is not as it was at the start of the tenancy. It's a good idea to take digital photos before leaving, in case there is a dispute about the condition in which you left the flat.

Where To Go For Advice And Information

SRC Advice Centre

John McIntyre Building

advice@src.gla.ac.uk

0141 339 8541

www.glasgowstudent.net/advice

Glasgow City Council HMO Unit

Development and Regeneration Services

0141 287 6531

Glasgow City Council

Private Landlord Registration Unit

0800 027 0414

www.landlordregistrationscotland.gov.uk

Glasgow University Accommodation Office

73 Great George Street

Glasgow

0141 330 4743

accom@gla.ac.uk

Shelter – Glasgow office

First Floor Suite 2

Breckenridge House

274 Sauchiehall Street

Glasgow

G2 3EH

0844 893 5560

www.shelter.org.uk

Viewing Checklist

This is a list of things you should check for, but add your own preferences as well.

Licence

If the flat is for three or more people, ask to see the licence or contact Glasgow City Council HMO unit. The licence should also be displayed in the flat.

Safety and Security

- Are the doors and windows secure?
- Are there effective locks on the front door/flat entrance?
- Are smoke alarms fitted and, if so, do they work?
- Is there a certificate of inspection for any gas appliances?
- Are there any gas or electric appliances which look unsafe?
- Do the windows open and close properly?
- Is there a fire escape?
- Are there late night buses to the area?
- Is the street well lit

Furniture and fittings

- Is there a desk and enough storage space in the bedroom?
- Is everything in good condition and working order?
- Does the kitchen have a working cooker, fridge and freezer?
- Is there an inventory?

Services

- Who is responsible for common lighting/cleaning?
- What are the arrangements for disposing of rubbish?
- Check that the cooker works properly.
- Flush the toilet, check the shower works and try all the taps.
- Who pays the bills?
- Is there a landline?

General condition

- Is the decoration in good repair?
- What state are the carpets?
- Is there any damp or mould?