



FEARLESS FLATHUNTING

AN SRC ADVICE CENTRE GUIDE



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.

Please note that all the information in this guide is accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of writing (January 2015). However, the SRC cannot accept responsibility for decisions made based on this information.



FLAT HUNTING

FINDING A FLAT

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 REGISTRATION

All landlords letting properties in the private sector must be registered with the local council. This scheme aims to ensure 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 at www.landlordregistrationscotland.gov.uk

HMO LICENCE

An HMO is a House in Multiple Occupation, 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 (0141 287 4535).

WHERE TO LOOK

GLASGOW UNIVERSITY ACCOMMODATION OFFICE

www.gla.ac.uk/accommodation

PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION DATABASE (PAD)

www.accom.gla.ac.uk/pad/

SRC FLATSHARE

www.glasgowstudent.net/services/flatshare

The SRC run a flatshare service, where you can find details of single rooms or entire flats, or advertise a vacancy.

NEWSPAPERS

Evening Times / The Herald / Sunday Herald

WEBSITES

Search for: S1Rental/Gumtree/Citylets/Glasgow West End / Pastures New / LettingWeb

These websites are a good resource for flat hunting, but remember that these are essentially adverts, so be wary if something looks too good to be true. When you are searching for accommodation online,

look out for when the website was last updated to make sure you're not viewing a property that's no longer for rent, or worse, a scam. The usual basic rules apply; **never** give out your personal details online.

For more information, please see '10 Tips for Avoiding Housing Scams', available on the Advice Centre website.

NOTICEBOARDS

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

LETTING AGENTS & FEES

There are a variety of different letting agents located in the West End, and the SRC has compiled a list based on geographical location, copies of which can be collected from the SRC Advice Centre.

Some letting agents may attempt to charge administration fees for services such as a credit check, renewing a lease etc, however the Scottish Government has confirmed that these charges are illegal. If you wish to challenge this type of fee or want more information, please contact the SRC Advice Centre at advice@src.gla.ac.uk

VIEWING ACCOMMODATION

Never accept a flat without going to see it and, if you can, take someone with you who has experience of renting.

CHECKLIST

Before you go draw up a checklist of the things you want to know about, or use the one provided at 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.

DEPOSITS

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. We strongly advise that you don't pay anything in advance for a property you haven't viewed.

PHOTOGRAPHS

If viewing the property beforehand isn't practical for you and you can't get a friend or relative to view it on your behalf, it would be reasonable to request as many pictures as possible from the landlord.

If, when you arrive, the property is significantly different, you may need to seek further advice about your options.



FLAT HUNTING

LEASE/TENANCY/DEPOSIT

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 IN THE FLAT

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, 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 at the termination of the lease, provided that all the bills have been paid and no damage has been done to the flat.

If your lease began after 21st December 2010, it is also now possible for your landlord to withhold your



rental deposit for any unpaid rent outstanding at the end of your tenancy. This rule does not apply to tenancies which commenced before this date. Again if you have any concerns over deductions your landlord has made from your deposit, you should contact the SRC Advice Centre for assistance.

As of July 2012, all private landlords have a legal requirement to place a tenant's deposit with an approved 3rd party scheme. This normally has to be done within 30 working days of the beginning of the tenancy and you should be notified of this in writing by the scheme administrator.

At the end of the tenancy both the tenant and landlord can contact the administrator to advise of any dispute over the amount of deposit to be returned, and if necessary the administrator can attempt to resolve any issues.

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 he will have to go to court for a repossession order and 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 he has let at the end of the fixed term.

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. If you're still wary or unsure about any part of your tenancy agreement, drop into the SRC Advice Centre and we'll be happy to look over it for you and explain anything you're unsure of.

RECEIPTS

Always get signed, dated receipts for any payments you make, which clearly state what the payments are for.

YOUR NEW FLAT

THE IMPORTANT BITS

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 the inventory.

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 into your flat.

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 he has responsibility for other repairs. Obviously the landlord 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. Your landlord should provide a phone number for use in emergencies. If you have had to phone because the problem was urgent, follow the call with a letter. If the landlord

does not respond within a reasonable time, you may be able to apply to the Private Rented Housing Panel (PRHP) to enforce the repair. See the back of this booklet for information about how to contact them.

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

RENT

You will probably be asked to pay one month's rent in advance. 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.

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.

Fuel companies will often require all tenants to be named on the fuel bill, and this can be a good safeguard to ensure that no-one tries to leave without paying their share.

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 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 Gas Safe Register 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 Glasgow City Council HMO Unit or alternatively you can 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 the Gas Safe Register can legally work on gas appliances - visit their website at www.gassaferegister.co.uk 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. There are specific regulations concerning the placing of CO detectors in HMOs.

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. You can opt-in to the automated system via MyCampus, or else complete a paper form which should be stamped by Student Services.

For more information please see the advice centre leaflet 'Council Tax and Housing Benefit'. If you are not living in a flat whereby all the tenants are full-time students then seek advice from us 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

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

EVICITION

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 at the end of the fixed period. 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/She may be quite agreeable to you finding a replacement tenant but you should never do this without his/her permission. If he/she is uncooperative and you decide to leave you will probably lose your deposit.

The landlord must 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.

CHECKLIST

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

HMO 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 locks on the front door/flat entrance effective?
- Are smoke alarms fitted and do they work?
- Is there a certificate of inspection for any gas appliances?
- Are there any unsafe gas/electric appliances
- 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 rubbish disposal arrangements?
- Check that the cooker works properly
- Flush the toilet and try all the taps.
- Who pays the bills?
- Is there a landline?
- Check the heating works
- Check whether the electricity/gas meters are prepayment or standard

GENERAL CONDITION

- Is the decoration in good repair?
- What state are the carpets?

USEFUL LINKS

SRC ADVICE CENTRE

JOHN MCINTYRE BUILDING

advice@src.gla.ac.uk

0141 330 5360

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

THE FRASER BUILDING

HILLHEAD STREET

0141 330 4743

accom@gla.ac.uk

SHELTER – GLASGOW OFFICE

0808 800 4444

www.shelter.org.uk

DETAILS OF TENANCY DEPOSIT SCHEMES

(Scottish Government website)

<http://tinyurl.com/d6bs4ow>





WWW.GLASGOWSTUDENT.NET

