

LETTING TO STUDENTS

We are often asked for guidelines to assist new landlords who are planning to purchase property to let to students. These notes have been compiled to answer some of the questions most frequently asked by property owners, or prospective property owners, who are thinking of letting to students.

- **Is the house I own, or am thinking of buying, suitable?**

Student demand is for properties in good overall condition within reasonable walking distance of the University's Whiteknights Campus. There is also a limited demand for properties close to the Bulmershe Court Campus. A map is available, showing the prime student residential areas. It is not really worth your while purchasing a property outside the marked areas.

The most popular size of house would offer four or five bedrooms plus living room. Three-bedroomed properties are also popular and there is an ever-increasing requirement for houses with six to ten bedrooms. Couples or two friends may be interested in renting suitable flats, but the price of self-contained flats often takes them out of the reach of the average student.

Students will not share bedrooms unless they are an established couple (in which case they are not usually interested in sharing a house with others).

PLEASE NOTE that all accommodation occupied by three or more persons not related to each other is **now** classified as an HMO (House in Multiple Occupation) regardless of whether the tenants share accommodation and meals 'as family' or not. **IN ADDITION** – owners of houses with 5 or more tenants in premises of more than two floors **must by law now have a license from the Local Authority** (known as a 'Mandatory Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation Licence'). This includes properties with occupied cellars or attic conversions and premises where the ground or other floor comprises shop or business premises and there are two or more other occupied floors.

Further information and registration forms available from your Local Authority:

HMO Team, Housing & Public Health
Reading Borough Council
Civic Centre,
Reading RG1 7TD
(Tel: 0118 939 0151)

or

Environmental and Housing Team (HMOs)
Wokingham Borough Council
Civic Offices, Shute End,
Wokingham, RG40 1BN
(Tel: 0118 974 6382 / 0118 974 6364)

- **What furniture is required?**

All the usual furnishings of a house, plus a desk or table and chair in each bedroom. It is not necessary to provide crockery, pots, pans and bedding, but a vacuum cleaner and cleaning equipment should be supplied.

All furniture supplied in let accommodation must meet the requirements of the **Furniture & Furnishing (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988**. Compliant furniture and furnishings carry a permanent sewn-in label. Further information is available from the Trading Standards Office at either Reading Borough Council (0118 939 0230) or Wokingham District Council (0118 974 6400).

- **Why are some houses more popular than others?**

Location is a very important factor, but obviously the condition of the property should be appealing. A dirty, untidy and badly repaired property will not be readily let, whereas an identical property nearby in a clean and well-maintained condition and at a reasonable rent will be let straight away.

The provision of certain facilities add to the appeal of your property. These are central heating (which is essential), telephone, fitted shower, fridge/freezer or fridge and additional freezer, microwave oven and washing machine. Any or all of these items will increase the likelihood of a successful letting.

Also recommended are fitted electric extractor fans in bathrooms and kitchens. These will not only help tenants to keep the property properly ventilated, but also will protect the structure and decoration by reducing condensation and mould growth.

Wherever possible, pipework should be lagged to protect it from frost damage (especially as the property is likely to be empty over the Christmas period). This minor expense in the summer can prevent the major expense and upheaval caused by burst pipes in the winter.

- **What about Heating and Safety Regulations?**

All bedrooms and living rooms must have a heater. Whenever possible central heating should be fitted. Electric heaters are costly to run and will not help to make a property popular. Most groups of students insist on central heating and will not bother to view a property where it is not fitted. It will be helpful if you explain the operation of controls for central heating or other appliances in case the students are unfamiliar with them.

The **Gas Safety (Installations & Use) Regulations 1998** place a legal duty on owners or managing agents of let property to maintain gas appliances and pipework, have them checked for safety at least once every 12 months, and provide a copy of each safety check (Landlord's Gas Safety Certificate) to new and existing tenants.

Electrical wiring should be tested every five years. All portable electrical appliances supplied, eg portable heaters, kettles etc, should be checked annually and any unauthorised or dangerous wiring replaced.

- **Any other safety requirements?**

All properties must have at least one smoke alarm on each floor. Ideally, these should be wired in, but battery operated units are acceptable at present.

Kitchens should be supplied with a fire blanket and/or extinguisher. These are available from local DIY stores such as Homebase or B & Q.

Second-floor rooms must be provided with an alternative means of escape in case of fire. Again, fire escape equipment can be obtained from DIY superstores.

- **Is security important?**

Crime continues to be an issue, and student accommodation is particularly vulnerable to burglary. Criminals know that students tend to be less aware of security issues, their houses are empty at certain times of the day, and that in shared residential accommodation there will usually be more than one television, computer, hi-fi, video etc.

Thames Valley Police operate a FREE police surveyed Property Security Scheme offering one, two and three star rated security awards which we are happy to include in the details of your property as an attraction to prospective tenants. This has proved hugely popular with our landlords and if you are interested in gaining such an award for your property, please contact Thames Valley Police – Sue Roff on 07970145493 or email: sue.roff@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk

The University recommends that window locks should be fitted to all ground floor windows and other accessible windows (ie by flats roofs etc). Many properties now have burglar alarm systems. Additional advice is available from Reading Borough Council's Safer Communities unit.

- **How much rent can I charge and for how long?**

Bear in mind the low income of students - there are no longer any student grants so they are dependent on loans and overdrafts.

The University does not set a specific rent, although you can always find out the current average by telephoning the Advisory Team (Accommodation) (0118 378 8054). Rents have stayed static or even been reduced over the past couple of years due to the economic situation and the large number of properties available.

Most contracts are for 11 or 12 months. As the yearly Sessions at the University of Reading end after the first week in July, it would be preferable to begin contracts from 1st August rather than 1st July. The majority of responsible landlords appreciate the opportunity to attend to routine maintenance and cleaning offered by an 11-month contract, but the fine details of this should be arranged between you and your student tenants.

- **Who pays for gas, electricity and telephone?**

The students do. You should arrange for final readings of all meters before the tenants move in. It is then the students' responsibility to make appropriate arrangements with the various utilities.

- **What about Water Charges?**

Most tenants pay rent inclusive of water charges. This is much more efficient when your tenants are students whose periods of tenancy do not necessarily coincide with the arrival of the half-yearly water bills.

However, it should be noted that tenancy agreements usually say that the tenant is liable to pay water rates, so special wording would need to be inserted - we are happy to advise on this if necessary.

- **Who pays the Council Tax?**

Properties occupied **only** by full time students, are exempt from Council Tax. Students will need to prove their status to Reading Borough Council. If the local authority requests evidence of student status, student tenants will need to send copies of their student ID cards to the Council Tax Office for this purpose.

Where the tenant group consists of a mixture of students and non-students, the person responsible for payment (the 'liable' person) will usually be the non-student tenant(s).

- **Who is responsible for maintenance and insurance?**

The owner is responsible for maintenance, also for insurance of the property and of those contents which belong to him. Students are recommended to arrange contents insurance to cover their own personal belongings.



Under no circumstances should students be asked to insure the house contents which are the property of the landlord.

- **What about a deposit?**

Since 6 April 2007 all deposits taken against damage etc from tenants with **Assured Shorthold Tenancies** in England and Wales, which covers the vast majority of tenancies for complete properties (rooms in owner's homes with shared facilities excepted) **must be protected** by a Government approved **Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme** and **not retained solely by the Landlord**.

It is anticipated that this **new law** will assist both landlords and tenants as the main problems experienced by both parties (tenants illegally withholding the last month's rent against return of deposit when the landlord subsequently finds damage to the property for which he then has no funds to cover repairs; and landlords unfairly withholding tenants deposits at the end of the tenancy) will be dealt with by the Deposit Protection Scheme providers.

There is a **free** dispute resolution service available from the Deposit Scheme administrators, who will also provide documentation (known as the 'Prescribed Information') for landlords to give to tenants to advise how their deposit has been dealt with and what to do at the end of the tenancy.

 Please see the government leaflet "**Letting? Are you protecting your tenant's deposit?**" for further details. 

- **Where can I get a contract?**

You may wish to consult your solicitor. However, many landlords use standard contracts which are available from reputable local stationers such as W.H. Smith

The Advisory Team (Accommodation) at The University of Reading has standard Assured Shorthold contracts available for sale, and is happy to send copies to landlords upon receipt of a cheque to cover cost. Please telephone Reading (0118) 378 8054 for the current price.

- **How is rent paid?**

Students will normally pay rent monthly, either by Standing Order through their bank or by cheque. We strongly advise students NOT to pay their rent in cash for security reasons, as this would entail amassing a large amount of cash in the house at a certain time each month, which could make the house a target for burglars.

Occasionally payments are made at the beginning of each Term to coincide with the arrival of the Student Loan cheque.

- **Anything else I need to know?**

New legislation is being introduced all the time, and since October 2008 it is a **legal requirement** that all rented properties must have a valid **Energy Performance Certificate** which landlords are responsible for ensuring is available for all prospective tenants to view.

To keep up with all the new legal requirements, you may find it helpful to join an organisation such as the **National Landlords Association** – information at www.landlords.org.uk or Tel: 020 7840 8900 for details. There are also local Landlord Forums which many student landlords find it helpful to attend.

- **Minimum Furnishings for Rented Properties**

Bathroom

Bath or shower, WC & wash hand basin for every 6 students
Floor covering
Curtains or blind
Towel rail
Mirror

Bedrooms

Carpet
Curtains
Desk or table and chair
Wardrobe
Bookshelf
Chest of drawers or dressing table
Single bed with clean mattress

General

Vacuum cleaner
Dustbin
Light bulbs and lampshades throughout
Heating in every room
Other cleaning items (although not essential)
Smoke alarms and fire blanket or extinguisher, as previously described
Lawn mower/garden tools (if tenants are required to maintain the gardens)

Common Room/Sitting Room

Carpet
Curtains
Easy Chairs/settee (enough for the household)
Dining table and chairs (if not provided in the kitchen)

Kitchen

1 cooker (4 rings or hotplates, plus grill and oven) to every 6 students
1 refrigerator/freezer
Adequate food storage and crockery cupboards
Adequate sized work surfaces
Dining table and chairs (if not provided in common room)
Floor covering
Curtains or blind
Rubbish bin, washing up bowl and rack

- **What do I do now?**

Telephone the Advisory Team (Accommodation) and we will send you a 'Student Accommodation Offer Form' (unless you already have one). You should complete all sections, sign the Landlord Declaration and return the form to us together with any relevant paperwork (Gas Safety Certificates etc) and your advertising fee. We can advise on the current average rent being charged and answer any other queries you may have before advertising your property on our website. Students will then contact you direct to make arrangements to view the property, pay deposit, sign contracts etc.

Your property details will be displayed on the University intranet for 8 weeks only (unless you advise us that it has been let). Should you wish to continue to advertise at the end of this period, just telephone the Advisory Team and we will be pleased to re-advertise for you. You will be able to make changes to the wording etc online, although certain fields are fixed (safety certificate dates etc). Any alterations you may wish to make to the rent must be sent in writing.

The busiest time for arranging private lets to students is during February/March when we advertise properties for occupation from July or August. This is when our current students begin looking for accommodation for their next University year.

A second peak occurs in September/October when many returning students and some new students begin to look for accommodation.

However, we continue to advertise properties throughout the year, as at most times of the year we will have students looking for accommodation.

Contact:

The Advisory Team (Accommodation)
Student Services Centre – Carrington Building
The University of Reading
Whiteknights
Reading RG6 6UA

Tel: (0118) 378 5555 or 8054

Email: studenthelp@reading.ac.uk or j.r.artivich@reading.ac.uk FAX: (0118) 378 4252