Private Sector Housing.

Information for students
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Introduction
Each year approximately 55% of the student population at the University of Sheffield live in private accommodation, so the private rented sector plays a crucial role in providing accommodation for a large number of our students.

This booklet is designed to offer these students general information and advice about looking for and living in private accommodation. Please note that this booklet is by no means a comprehensive guide to all aspects of the private sector. Accommodation & Campus Services produce a range of other information leaflets and details of these publications can be found in the Other Publications section towards the end of this leaflet. Additional housing information, advice and associated publications may also be obtained from the Student Advice Centre at the Union of Students.

University of Sheffield Registration Scheme
Accommodation & Campus Services at the University of Sheffield operate a registration scheme for student properties in the private sector. All new offers of student accommodation are inspected by staff from Accommodation & Campus Services and routine re-inspections of these registered properties are carried out on a periodic basis.

All registered properties, with the exceptions of lodgings accommodation and rooms with resident owners, are required to meet the standards of the Sheffield Responsible Landlord Scheme. Alternatively, if applicable, registered properties must meet the statutory requirements of Mandatory Licensing for larger properties.

The Sheffield Responsible Landlord Scheme comprises of a Physical Property Standard and also a detailed Management and Tenants Code of Practice. The scheme aims to assist and encourage landlords to manage their property to the highest possible standards. It also aims to help student tenants make informed choices of accommodation secure in the knowledge that a property in the scheme will provide a decent standard of accommodation.

The Physical Property Standards and the Management and Tenants Code of Practice contain detailed requirements for landlords to adhere to in both the standard of their properties and in the management of these properties. Further information regarding the requirements of the Sheffield Responsible Landlord Scheme can be obtained from Accommodation & Campus Services.

Please note that Accommodation & Campus Services require landlords to re-apply for registration of their properties on an annual basis.

Types of private accommodation
Shared houses and flats
The most popular type of private accommodation is for a number of student friends to share a house/flat and to live together as a group. Each student has their own bedroom and they share communal rooms such as the living room, kitchen and bathroom. Demand for shared houses/flats is normally extremely high from January to April each year when groups of students who are returning to Sheffield for the next academic year start to search for suitable properties.
The most common arrangement is for a group of four to share together, although there are also a reasonable number of properties for groups of three and five. It can be difficult and often quite expensive to find properties for groups of two. Large groups of six or more will find that there are fewer properties to choose from and the larger properties which are close to the University, for example in Broomhill and Crookesmoor, are generally the most expensive.

**Flat shares**
Flat shares refer to whole houses/flats where the bedrooms are let separately to individual students. Each student has their own bedroom and they share communal rooms such as the living room, kitchen and bathroom with other students. Flat shares are therefore popular with single students who are looking for a room in a shared house/flat and each bedroom is let individually. However, the tenants have joint responsibility for payment of the utilities and are responsible to the landlord for the care of the property.

**Bedsits and studio flats**
Houses that have been converted into smaller self-contained units for single students are very popular and there is always very high demand, mainly with older students who prefer greater independence and privacy. Each unit usually consists of a single bedroom with a kitchen area and a shared bathroom. Bedsits differ from houses shared by groups because each unit is let separately and the tenancies bear no relation to each other, usually starting and ending on different dates.

**Self-contained flats**
This is another extremely popular type of housing both for single and married students. Demand for self-contained flats is high throughout the year and students often find it extremely difficult to find affordable flats. A self-contained flat may have one or two bedrooms with a separate living room, kitchen and bathroom.

**Accommodation with resident owners**
Accommodation with a resident owner is sometimes referred to as ‘accommodation with a family’ although a wide variety of people (including students, professional people and families) provide this type of accommodation. The normal arrangement is for the resident owner to provide the exclusive use of a bedroom with shared use of the kitchen, bathroom and possibly the living room. There is a reasonable level of demand from students for this type of accommodation and it is often preferred by older students who are looking for a quiet place to live and study.

Some students prefer to live with a resident owner because it can often provide good quality accommodation at a reasonable price and also allow both the owner and the student a degree of flexibility, for example over the period of notice. The period of notice will depend on the arrangements over rent. For example, a student who pays rent every four weeks would normally need to give four weeks notice from the date the rent is due.

**Lodgings accommodation**
This is similar to accommodation with a resident owner but lodgings accommodation includes the provision of some meals. Lodgings accommodation is generally provided by local families and is sometimes known as ‘short stay’ accommodation. In recent years there has been much less demand from students for lodgings accommodation. However, there is sometimes demand for lodgings from students on short-term courses.
Accommodation for families and couples

A small number of registered properties are available for student couples and families. These properties range from self-contained flats (or apartments) with one or two bedrooms to whole houses (either terraced properties or semi-detached properties) with two or three bedrooms. However, the overall supply of private accommodation for student couples and families is limited and families with three or more children will find it difficult and expensive to secure suitable accommodation in the private sector.

Accommodation & Campus Services produce a booklet Information for families which can be obtained from Accommodation & Campus Services or downloaded from the website at:

www.shef.ac.uk/housing/additional/married.html

Rents

Rents generally reflect the standard of the accommodation on offer although location is also a significant factor in determining weekly rent levels. Accommodation which is located near to the University with ensuite facilities in each bedroom is likely to be the most expensive type of accommodation available. Terraced houses with shared bathroom facilities which are located in areas up to a 15 minute walk from the University e.g. in areas such as Crookes, are often considerably less expensive. The size of the property, particularly for groups of six or more, is an additional factor. Larger properties for groups in very popular areas such as Broomhill or Crookesmoor are generally in high demand and this is often reflected in the weekly rent level.

Properties which are in the most popular locations are now generally let at full rent for a 12 month period. However, it is worth noting that for properties which are slightly further away from the University in locations such as Crookes and Walkley, a number of landlords may reduce the rent during the summer vacations provided that the property is unoccupied.

When students are looking at potential properties they should look very closely at rent levels and be aware of exactly what is included in the rent. For example does the rent include any gas, electricity or water bills or any form of internet access? Before signing tenancy agreements students are also advised to look carefully at the dates when the rent is due to be paid and make sure that they are happy with all of the financial arrangements.

Further advice for students about rent levels can be obtained from Accommodation & Campus Services.

House mates

Living in the private sector offers students a huge amount of freedom and independence and sharing a private house with friends is often a great experience for many students. You can choose what and when to cook; you can demonstrate your full culinary talents by providing a meal for your new housemates, or you can simply visit the local take away.

But remember, you will never really get to know someone until you have lived with them. Accommodation & Campus Services see a significant number of students who experience difficulties with their housemates and are anxious to leave their accommodation. Arguments over trivial things like the washing up, the cleaning rota and shopping duties are often the source of great conflicts and many friendships are severely tested within the
first few weeks of the academic year. As you will almost certainly have signed a fixed term contract, your landlord is only likely to be able to offer you their sympathy.

Therefore you are advised to spend some valuable time before signing your tenancy agreement, discussing what you and your housemates actually want from your year together. This is very important as if you choose the right people to live with you should have a great time together. If not though you could experience difficulties during your year together that could even affect your studies.

**Contracts**

The majority of private sector accommodation is let on fixed term Assured Shorthold tenancy agreements, normally for a full 52-week period. Once a fixed term tenancy agreement is signed the tenant(s) will be secure for the full contractual period and the landlord will be unable to ask the tenant(s) to leave the property unless there has been a breach of the terms of the tenancy agreement; such as the non payment of rent. In such circumstances, however, you should note that there are clear legal guidelines for the landlord to follow, before the tenant(s) is required to leave the property, and these include the serving of a Notice to Quit followed by the granting of a Possession Order by a County Court.

Once the contract is signed the tenant(s) will be secure for the contractual period. This consequently means that student tenants will remain responsible for the terms of their tenancy agreements until the end of the fixed term period. Students who wish to move out of their accommodation before the end of the fixed term period are advised to discuss the situation in appropriate detail with their landlord before they move out of the accommodation. Landlords are not obliged to release students from their tenancy agreements and many landlords will not release student tenants unless, or until, a suitable replacement tenant can be found. Students who otherwise break the tenancy agreement and move out of a property will remain legally liable for payment of their rent until the tenancy agreement ends or until a suitable replacement is found. Consequently, students can sometimes find themselves in very difficult circumstances if they break a tenancy agreement and move into a second property as they will then have accepted liability for the payment of rent at two properties.

Students are therefore advised to think very carefully before signing any tenancy agreement and to be clear about all of the arrangements. As a matter of good practice it is recommended that students are given 24 hours to consider the terms of any tenancy agreement before they sign, enabling them to seek further advice, if necessary, from either Accommodation & Campus Services or the Student Advice Centre.

Please note that the Union of Students produce a model Assured Shorthold tenancy agreement which is recommended by Accommodation & Campus Services. This tenancy agreement is well written and it is easy for both the landlord and tenant to understand. Consequently many registered landlords use this model tenancy agreement.

**Lettings with resident owners**

Lettings with resident owners, provided that some form of living accommodation is shared with the resident owner, are not covered by Assured Shorthold tenancy agreements. In this situation, where students share living accommodation with the resident owner such as a living room or a kitchen, the letting is known as an Excluded Let rather than a tenancy. Many resident owners use their own written agreements.
contracts or “house rules” for this type of letting. Some resident owners may even rely upon a verbal agreement, although some form of written agreement is recommended to avoid the possibility of misunderstandings at a later date.

With resident owner lettings there can be much more flexibility as it is quite common to have a monthly arrangement (rather than an agreement for a fixed term such as 12 months) but this can also mean that there is less security. For example, a monthly arrangement is subject to one month's notice from either the resident owner or from the student.

A resident owner who does not share living accommodation with a tenant but lets self-contained accommodation e.g. a basement flat will almost certainly have created a tenancy. In these circumstances an Assured Shorthold tenancy agreement should be used.

Please note that arrangements for lettings with resident owners vary and students are advised to check the appropriate details for themselves before making a booking.

**Deposits and inventories**

A landlord is entitled to charge a deposit, sometimes also called a bond, as a security against the tenancy. This deposit is quite separate from the rent payments and students are advised to obtain a receipt. The deposit is refunded after the tenant has moved out, the keys have been returned and the landlord has checked the property. Deductions can be made from a deposit to cover the cost of any damage or repairs that result from the negligence of the tenant, including any necessary cleaning.

**Tenancy Deposit Protection Schemes**

The Housing Act 2004 introduced new legislation regarding tenancy deposits. From April 2007 all tenancy deposits, for assured shorthold tenancies, must be protected by one of the national Tenancy Deposit Protection Schemes. The landlord must then provide the tenants with details of the Tenancy Deposit Scheme in which the deposit is held within 14 days of the deposit being paid.

The aim of the national Tenancy Deposit Protection Schemes is to provide private tenants with a greater degree of security in relation to tenancy deposits and to facilitate the resolution of disputes arising between landlords and tenants over the return of deposits.

**Inventories**

Registered landlords are required by the Sheffield Responsible Landlord Scheme to produce an inventory at the start of the tenancy for all lettings with assured shorthold tenancy agreements. Although an inventory is not compulsory with the Tenancy Deposit Protection Schemes the use of an inventory is strongly recommended as it will help to avoid any misunderstandings or disputes at the end of the tenancy.

The inventory should list all of the items in the property at the start of the tenancy and clearly state their condition e.g. living room carpet (brand new), arm chair (damaged arm rest) etc.

Accommodation & Campus Services produce a sample inventory and copies of this can be obtained from Accommodation & Campus Services.
Gas, electricity and water charges

In the majority of shared houses and flats in the private sector, student tenants are responsible for paying gas and/or electricity bills. Normally there are credit meters and the tenants are billed on a quarterly basis by the relevant utility suppliers. It is now increasingly common for the tenants to also be responsible for paying water bills (or water rates) and students should check these details carefully with the landlord before they decide to rent accommodation.

In smaller self-contained units such as bedsits or some studio flats there may be separate, coin operated, pre-payment meters for gas and/or electricity in each unit. With this arrangement individual tenants are responsible for the gas and/or electricity that they use in their unit. Lighting and heating in the communal rooms is normally included in the rent.

For lettings with resident owners and lodgings accommodation it is often the case that gas, electricity and water rates are included in the rent. Although these arrangements can vary and students should check the details before they decide to rent accommodation.

If heating and/or electricity is included in the rent students are always advised to clarify exactly what this means and establish if there are any limitations to the use of electricity or the provision of heating.

Where utility bills are not included in the rent students should take appropriate meter readings on the start date of the tenancy. These readings can be recorded on the inventory so that there is a clear record and this will help to avoid any confusion when the first bills arrive. Students should also register with the appropriate utility companies as quickly as possible (see the Useful Telephone Numbers section at the end of this booklet). The landlord may be able to help tenants identify the previous utility suppliers at the property and landlords should always be informed when students change their utility suppliers.

Telephone and internet services

The majority of private sector properties are provided with a landline telephone and the re-connection fees/telephone bills are generally the responsibility of the student tenants. Students should note that it can be quite expensive to have a landline telephone installed so this is something to look for when viewing properties.

An increasing number of landlords provide internet connections in every bedroom although the means of achieving this varies from property to property. Students are advised to discuss their individual requirements for internet access with the landlord before they agree to rent the property.

Council tax

Council Tax is a property based tax. Full time students are “disregarded” for the purposes of Council Tax so if a property is occupied wholly by full time students it will be exempt from Council Tax and there will be no liability either for the students or the landlord. However, if a property is occupied by four full time students and one of the occupants ceases to be a student because they finish studying or they fail their exams, the property ceases to be exempt and there will then be liability for the payment of Council Tax.

Please note that Sheffield City Council may not be aware that a particular property is occupied by students. In these circumstances the tenants will need to produce a copy of
the tenancy agreement along with student certificates from all of the student tenants concerned in order to claim exemption from the Council Tax. The University produces a student certificate for Council Tax exemption for all of our registered students and this is available from the Student Services Information Desk (SSiD) in the Union of Students.

**Insurance of personal belongings**

Students will need to arrange for their own insurance cover for all of their personal belongings in private accommodation. It is also worth noting that there are now several student insurance policies that also provide cover for personal and occupier's liability. This would provide cover for damage to property or accidental injury as a result of negligence.

Landlords are required to insure the structure of their property as well as the fixtures and fittings but are not required to insure the personal belongings of their tenants.

**The Local Community**

Sheffield is a very friendly city with a reputation as one of the safest cities in the United Kingdom with relatively low levels of crime. When moving into private accommodation students are therefore advised to introduce themselves to their neighbours and to make an effort to get to know their new environment so that they can appreciate and understand the needs and any concerns of the local community. Students have a vital role to play as members of the local community and Accommodation & Campus Services produce a “Dear neighbour letter” which can be downloaded from the Housing Finder website at:

[www.shef.ac.uk/housing/privatehousing/help/leaflet.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/housing/privatehousing/help/leaflet.html)

Presenting a copy of this letter to your neighbours is an ideal form of introduction and it is a gesture that will be appreciated by the vast majority of local residents. If you get to know your neighbours well you are likely to be rewarded with a wave or friendly word whenever you see them. Local residents can also provide expert advice on good local shops and amenities and may even offer to keep an eye on your house when you are away on vacation.

Moving into private accommodation for the first time is an exciting experience for students as it provides a great deal of freedom and independence. However, please refrain from disturbing other local residents by activities such as playing loud music late into the night. There should be no intrusive noise into neighbouring rooms or properties (especially during the late evening/early hours of the morning period) and you can be held responsible for the behaviour of your visitors.

Accommodation & Campus Services produce a more detailed leaflet titled *Students in the Community* which is available from propertywithUS in the Union of Students or you can download it from the Housing Finder website at:

[www.shef.ac.uk/housing/privatehousing/help/leaflet.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/housing/privatehousing/help/leaflet.html)

This leaflet is essential reading for all students living in the private sector and is particularly useful for students moving into private sector accommodation for the first time. There is a range of information and advice on things to do when moving in to a new private property, help on practical matters during your tenancy including information about refuse disposal and car parking and helpful information on procedures to adopt when you move out of the property.
Refuse disposal
More information regarding the disposal of domestic refuse is provided in the Accommodation & Campus Services leaflet titled Students in the Community (see the information above). When you move into private accommodation the landlord or your neighbours will be able to advise you of the day for the weekly collection of your grey wheeled bin for household waste and the monthly collection date for your blue wheeled bin for recycled paper and cardboard.

Students should avoid the accumulation of rubbish on the premises by ensuring that refuse bins are put out on the kerbside by 7.00am on the day of collection (with the lid closed) and returned to the property by no later than 9.00am on the day after scheduled collection has occurred. Any waste that is not placed in the wheeled bin correctly will not be removed and blue wheeled bins which contain household waste will not be emptied. Please note that Sheffield City Council may issue notices on how to manage wheeled bins including removing them from the footpath after emptying and fixed Penalty Notices may be used to ensure that standards are met.

Repairs
Landlords have a statutory duty to maintain the structure and exterior of the property in a safe and watertight condition. Landlords are also required to keep in good and safe condition any installations for water, gas, electrical services, sanitation, heating and hot water.

Occasionally students complain that their landlord is slow to carry out repairs. Landlords who have properties registered with Accommodation & Campus Services are required, as far as possible, to respond to repairs during the course of the tenancy as outlined in the Management and Tenants Code of Practice of the Sheffield Responsible Landlord Scheme. The details of the recommended response times for repairs are as follows:

**Category A (Emergency)**
All repairs endangering the safety, health or security of the residents or the structure of the building e.g. gas leaks, major electrical faults, blocked WCs.

**Response time:** Within 24 hours of notification. This should include a response to burglary damage and the immediate boarding/repair of any insecure door or window.

**Category B (Urgent)**
Complete breakdown of heating/hot water systems and serious lighting faults.

**Response time:** Within three working days of notification.

**Category C**
All other urgent repairs affecting the structure and services of the property but not regarded to be prejudicial to the safety, health or security of the residents or the structure of the building e.g. direct water penetration, refrigerator breakdowns and major cooker faults.

**Response time:** Within seven working days of notification.
Category D

All other repairs reported but which do not affect the safety, health or security of the residents or the structure of the building and are services which do not prevent reasonable occupation of the accommodation e.g. plasterwork and minor furniture repairs.

Response time: Within three weeks of notification.

A repair will usually be carried out within the above timescales. However, it is recognised that there may be circumstances where this may not be achievable. In such cases landlords should advise tenants of anticipated completion dates for repairs where target dates cannot be met and make any necessary arrangements to maintain health and safety until the repairs are completed.

Students should ideally notify their landlord of all repairs in writing and keep a copy of the letter for future reference. Please remember that the landlord, or his agents, will need access to the property. If access is not successfully arranged then delays in the repair are likely to be experienced. If a registered landlord persistently ignores requests for repairs then help may be sought from Accommodation & Campus Services.

Please note that landlords are not responsible for repairs which result from the tenants’ negligence e.g. unblocking sinks which are blocked by waste food.

Right of access

When access to the property is required by a landlord, for routine inspection, rent collection or maintenance, it is recommended that at least 24 hours notice is given to the tenants. In the case of an emergency it is recommended that the tenants co-operate as fully as possible with the landlord. The landlord should not assume that he has unlimited access to the property.

Help for students

The registration scheme maintained by Accommodation & Campus Services provides University students with access to a comprehensive range of University registered accommodation in the private sector. And throughout the year, staff at Accommodation & Campus Services is pleased to offer advice to students on all matters relating to the private sector e.g. acceptable levels of rent, contracts and deposits. During busy periods of the year e.g. in September, an appointment with a member of staff may be necessary.

Accommodation & Campus Services send an annual newsletter to student tenants in registered properties, shortly after the start of the academic year. The newsletter reviews important issues such as gas safety and security and contains helpful information about services and facilities such as local recycling facilities.

Exclusion of liability

Please note the University has made every effort to check the accuracy of the information contained on the register. However students should also carry out their own inspection of a property before entering into a tenancy agreement. It should also be noted that re-inspection of registered properties only takes place on a periodic basis and no assurance can be given by the University regarding the condition of properties in between inspections. The University does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage whether direct, indirect or consequential suffered by a student as a result of the student using the register. The University is also not in any way a managing agent for the landlord and any disputes between tenants and landlords are not the responsibility of the University.
Although Accommodation & Campus Services staff inspects student accommodation they do not have resources or technical expertise to ensure that all of the very detailed statutory criteria governing housing conditions and standards have been observed. Therefore the University cannot accept any responsibility in cases where these statutory criteria may have been infringed.

Please note the University is not seeking to exclude or restrict liability for death or personal injury caused by the negligence of the University or its staff.

Other Publications
Accommodation & Campus Services also provide a range of other private sector information leaflets for students and these publications can either be collected from propertywithUS in the Union of Students or downloaded from the Housing Finder website at:
www.shef.ac.uk/housing/privatehousing/help/leaflet.html

These publications are as follows:

Guide to Student Districts in Sheffield
A useful guide to popular student areas around the University.

Housing Checklist
A checklist of points to consider when viewing privately rented accommodation.

Advice for Women Students
Information designed to assist women students seeking private rented accommodation.

Looking for Private Accommodation: Information for Returning Students
Information designed to assist returning students seeking private rented accommodation.

Looking for Private Accommodation: Information for New Students
Information designed to assist new students seeking private rented accommodation.

Looking for Short Term Private Sector Accommodation
Information designed to assist students who are seeking private rented accommodation for less than an academic year.

Students in the Community
Practical advice for students moving into private rented accommodation and living in the local community.
Useful telephone numbers

**propertywithUS**
The University of Sheffield  
(Located on Level 3 Union of Students)  
University Health Service  
University Counselling Service  
The University of Sheffield 24 Hour Control

**Union of Students**
Enquiries  
Student Advice Centre

**Sheffield City Council**
Housing Aid Centre  
Council Tax Office Enquiries  
Veolia Environmental Services (Wheeled Bins)

**South Yorkshire Police**
Non Emergency Calls (Police HQ)

**Utilities**
British Telecom Residential Customer Services  
British Telecom Residential Repair Services  
British Gas Emergency Service (Transco)  
Metering Point Administration Service  
(Identifies who your electricity supplier is)  
Transco  
(Identifies who your gas supplier is)  
TV license  
Yorkshire Water (General enquiries)  
Yorkshire Water (Bill enquiries)  
Yorkshire Electricity Distribution  
(Power cuts and emergencies)
Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information given in this publication but the University does not accept responsibility for any errors or omissions. There may be changes to some of the information provided following publication of this booklet.

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