Headlease handbook for landlords
Making our students feel at home
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What is the Headlease Housing Scheme?

The Headlease Housing Scheme gives our students the option to rent study bedrooms in high quality, university-managed housing within the private sector – with the reassurance that the accommodation is tailored to their needs and represents value for money.

For landlords, the scheme provides guaranteed rental contracts and hassle-free letting, as well as many other benefits including offering a higher degree of care for your property than most commercial letting firms.

We are part of the UUK code of standards.
THE BENEFITS

• Guaranteed rent
• Rent paid in monthly instalments
• No landlord fees or admin charges (*except a fee in event of property sale under contract).
• Contracts from 42 weeks to 104 weeks
• 24-hour repair service
• All tenancy allocations, agreements and matters including damages, disciplinary and eviction dealt with by university (with exception of ‘fair wear and tear’)
• Property inspection each semester
• Right to rent checks
• No need to join a deposit protection scheme
• Fortnightly cleaning of communal areas
• Inventory
• Public liability insurance
• Student room contents insurance
• Dedicated community liaison team
• Wifi and utility bills paid (except water)
• The satisfaction of knowing that you have contributed to University of Sussex students having a positive experience of both university life and Brighton by providing a lovely shared home.

WHAT DOES THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX SEEK IN RETURN?

Clean, pleasant, well maintained and fully-furnished properties from three bedroom upwards in Brighton and Hove near a good bus or train route, owned by lovely landlords who are a pleasure to deal with and who believe that students deserve to live in the same civilised conditions they would expect for their own children.
LETTING A PROPERTY

Rents, contracts and responsibilities

HOW IS RENT SET?
If a house is offered within our catchment area we will arrange a mutually convenient time to meet potential landlords at the property and assess the house/measure rooms. If we feel the property will be suitable for our students we will then prepare a no-obligation rental quotation which will vary according to the size of property/rooms, number of rooms and standard of and number of facilities.

HOW IS RENT PAID?
Once the contracts have been agreed and signed off, rent is paid in monthly equal instalments from the contract start date, (mid-September each year – start dates may vary), i.e. 12 based on a 52 week contract. Rent instalments are paid directly into the property owner’s bank account within 10 working days of rent due date.

ABOUT CONTRACTS
Headlease housing contracts are between the property owner and the University of Sussex (the University then sub-lets the rooms to its students in separate individual contracts).

Proof of property ownership will be required before contracts can be confirmed, along with other terms which will be made clear in writing. Contract holders are requested to nominate a next-of-kin who can take over the remainder of the contract should contract holders be unfortunate enough to suffer accident, ill health or pre-decease the term of the contract. Contract holders are also asked to advise the Housing Office of any holidays or long periods where they will be unobtainable.

Contracts commence every September as we follow the academic year rather than the calendar year. We start looking for the coming year’s housing stock from October onwards. Student contracts typically run from September to the following September, giving 7-10 days turnaround time before new tenants move in if the landlord contract is being renewed for that property. Housing staff will liaise with property owners for the arrangement of any works or upgrades found to be necessary. We recommend that landlords do not coincide their holidays with Arrivals Week each September, just in case any property issues arise needing their co-operation or consent while our tenants move in and settle down.

Landlords may not sub-let the property if it should fall empty early whilst it is under contract for 52 weeks to the University (where undergraduates vacate in June the University re-allocates Headlease rooms to summer conferences and visitors).
WHAT ARE LANDLORDS RESPONSIBLE FOR?

The landlord is responsible for providing the following certificates:

- NIECIC Electrical Safety Certificate (5-yearly, unless shorter period stated on certificate).
- Portable appliance testing (yearly).
- Fire alarm/system certificate and fire equipment.
- Arranging yearly boiler servicing/any service contracts (if you have these in place, please advise the Housing Office so we can call your designated plumbers or heating engineers).
- Taking out appropriate landlord property insurance and mortgage insurance on the property if there is a mortgage.
- Paying relevant Income Tax on your rental income from the property (please consult www.hmrc.co.uk) or your accountant.
- Ensuring evidence of all planning permissions.
- Providing an HMO licence for the property if required.

Please provide the Housing Office with copies of each current certificate as it is updated and ensure copies of the latest safety certificates are also left at the property for the tenants.

The landlord is also responsible for:

- Delivering a property in good repair inside and out and in accordance with any conditions set out in the Tenant’s Offer Letter and contract.
- All ongoing structural maintenance including external decoration.
- Arranging yearly gutter cleaning.
- Exterior window cleaning twice a year.
- Internal decoration, flooring, fixtures and fittings (we recommend a three-year rolling programme).
- Furnishing the property in accordance with University requirements and safety compliance.
- Kitchen appliances.
- Fire safety provision (the university requires all properties to possess hardwired interlinked smoke detectors with heat detector in kitchen) and to provide professional Fire Risk Assessments.
- Ensuring adequate security and providing a quality lock on each study/bedroom with thumb turns on the inside of each lock for easy escape in emergency.
- Ensuring tenants are unable to accidentally lock themselves into any part of the property. This means using quality door handles as well as locks with thumb turns.
- Ensuring any broken appliances are replaced.
- Paying water bills.
- Providing Housing Office with 3 x each bedroom key, 10 x front door keys (based on a 4-bed property), 2 x back door keys and a side gate key, if applicable (all labelled) at start of property contract.
- Mattress protectors for all beds.
WHAT IF THERE ARE DAMAGES AT THE END OF CONTRACT?

We organise cleaning and any rubbish removal necessary when the tenants move out. We also assess the properties for damages and repairs/check keys. If damages have been caused either negligently or deliberately we will cover them. If it is a ‘fair wear and tear’ issue or the item; i.e: a piece of broken furniture or pipe work was old or failed because it was not of sufficient quality/correctly installed, that would be a landlord responsibility to remedy.

It would also be a landlord responsibility to undertake internal repairs and redecorations caused as a result of structural failure (i.e. if a chimney flashing or a roof tile failure outside leads to an internal leak). We are happy to arrange to meet landlords at properties if there are any grey areas to discuss.

All claims need to be made within six weeks of the end of contract. In the event of the University agreeing to pay for repairs or replacements, costs must be agreed in writing prior to works going ahead. The University will not reimburse unauthorised works or replacements. In addition copies of all original receipts and invoices need to be submitted with written claim (auditory requirement) in order to process agreed reimbursements.

The University follows the lettings industry standard for damage contribution (taking into account ‘fair wear and tear’). We also abide by the law of betterment which states than an allowance must be made when considering compensation for damage and that old items may not be replaced by new at the tenant’s expense – known as ‘betterment’.
Standard of accommodation

We let properties of all types from three bedrooms upwards.

The property must be self-contained with its own access and in good general order.

All properties should possess reasonably-sized bedrooms of not less than 6.5m sq with adequate headroom in order for the space to be fully useable, a kitchen, a bathroom, a WC and a lounge/diner or communal area.
STANDARD OF ACCOMMODATION

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

If a property contains a minimal size study bedroom, it is expected that there will be a communal lounge to counter-balance this. Alternatively it is worth considering moving the partition wall a few inches to take a chunk out of a larger bedroom to enlarge the smallest bedroom to a more generous size if this is possible. All internal and external doors should fit frames snugly and have no gaps around.

Shower rooms and bathrooms should be of adequate size to enable room to change clothes and also possess a dry area for hanging clothes and towels. All basins, sinks, showers and baths need to have hot and cold running water supplies and the house needs to generate sufficient hot water at acceptable water pressure for the number of residents likely to be showering in quick succession. One internal WC needed per five tenants. More than five tenants also requires a second cooker and sink in kitchen, though if space is a problem a full-feature microwave oven and dishwasher may be acceptable as the additional facilities.

OUTSIDE

- Properties should be in good decorative order using appropriate exterior finishes.
- Gardens and yards should be safe and free of builders’ or other debris and any disintegrating sheds or outbuildings, but please provide a shed or bicycle shelter and hooks for bike security.
- Ensure working exterior light in front door porch area and PIR light for security in rear yard or garden if there is side or other access to rear.
- Front doors need to have a working bell or knocker and a draught-proof letterbox.
- Property number needs to be affixed to property and be clearly visible from a distance in the event of emergency vehicle attendance.
- Front and back door mats should be provided and replaced yearly to reduce amount of dirt and dust going into house.
- Washing line or rotary dryer should be provided in rear garden or yard to reduce condensation in house. If no outside space, please provide a dryer indoors.
- Any steps leading up to house or down to basement (front or rear) must possess sound handrails and external steps, tiles and slabs should also be in good order to prevent trips and falls.
- Check bins are present and marked with property number to deter theft. Please ensure larger bins ordered from council for shared properties as these generate more rubbish.
STANDARD OF ACCOMMODATION

FURNITURE

All furniture should be attractive, strong and useful with soft furnishings compliant with The Furniture and Furnishings Fire Safety Regulations 1988 (amended 1993), which will be manufacturer-labelled. Built-in furniture lasts the longest and often maximises available storage best. It can also add value to a property when it comes to resale. Contract furniture (i.e. hotel standard) is a worthwhile investment whether new or second hand, though we ask that all mattresses are bought new.

In smaller study/bedrooms it may be necessary to be clever with furniture to ensure that smaller rooms are not left with fewer facilities than larger rooms. Installing a wardrobe/drawer combi unit for example, instead of separate drawers and wardrobe, or sourcing a bed with divan drawers underneath can help. Compact desks measured to fit the space with drawers and shelves attached are also beneficial in smaller rooms. In fact it is better for desks to have shelves above than to put shelves on walls above the bed for safety reasons.

Tenants should not have to go outside their rooms to access furniture on the landing, though in some cases two undersized rooms can be counted as one room (i.e. one for sleeping and one for study) if property layout does not enable them to be knocked through into one room.

Do not install double beds or wash hand basins in small rooms as tenants would rather have the extra space.

Concerning beds, while we would not ask landlords to dispose of existing double beds in good condition, each student tenant has signed up for a single-occupancy room (irrespective of room size), so there is no necessity to provide double beds when beds need replacing. Conversely please do not install single beds which are narrower than 3’ wide or shorter than 6’3” long.

On a general note, please avoid furnishing properties with cheap chipboard or laminate furniture, cardboard bed bases, thin wood slatted bed bases or anything old and tatty or made of canvas or plastic as this will only lead to tenant complaints and maintenance issues. Similarly do not furnish student properties with antiques which are either valuable or will break easily (elderly chairs are particularly fragile as the wood dries out).

Remember that even with the best tenants multiple-occupational properties get much more use than a family home and plan/purchase accordingly. A good rule of thumb is to provide as much useful storage as possible without over stuffing a room. Putting the right furniture and fittings into a student house from the outset saves money (and problems) in the long term and also encourages tenants to look after the property better and give more positive feedback on their tenancy there.

Landlords are not obliged to store any furniture for the tenants as tenants have accepted a fully-furnished house as part of their tenancy agreement and should not bring their own furniture as well (which may not be fire safety compliant). If there is a problem with the furniture provided, tenants need to report this to the Housing Office and we will liaise with landlords to resolve.
WHAT TO PROVIDE

What do you need to provide at the property?

COMMUNAL SPACE/LOUNGE

Lounge or communal area should provide one comfortable armchair or equivalent per student and a shared coffee table. This can be any configuration of armchairs or sofas, though please avoid a collection of mis-matched furniture and saggy chairs or sofas. L-shaped sofas are the most popular with students and can be useful for awkward spaces or for dividing the space into two parts for lounge and dining use.

Dining table or breakfast bar should provide one dining chair or stool per tenant and be of sufficient size for tenants to sit together for dining and social use. If the space is limited, stackable dining chairs and a folding dining table can be helpful, though folding chairs do not tend to be very strong. Banqueting chairs with metal frames are recommended as economical, comfortable, stackable and strong.

KITCHEN/DINER/LOUNGE COMBINED

An increasing number of student properties have this arrangement, particularly following extension. Clever design is needed to successfully achieve this layout without compromising one or all of the three functions, especially in a property of 6–9 tenants.

An extending dining table and folding/stackable chairs or a breakfast bar for meals are options which should be considered so that tenants have the choice of dining together, or reducing the size of the table and putting some chairs away to increase living space if not all tenants are present.

There should be a comfortable seat for each tenant and a dining chair or breakfast bar stool, an individual kitchen cupboard, a shelf in the fridge and a shelf in the freezer, however this is configured. Space will be needed for an extra sink or dishwasher and second cooker in a property for more than five tenants. If there is no space at all for a lounge area, then dining chairs should be upholstered and comfortable if they are to serve both functions, though losing a lounge area altogether is not ideal.

The following pages provide more detailed checklists for different areas of the property, and other requirements.
**WHAT TO PROVIDE CHECKLIST**

**Kitchen**
- Roller blind for window.
- Washing machine (preferably with simple controls).
- Cooker. Free-standing or built-in with a separate 4-ring hob, clearly visible operating controls and working auto-ignition. Electric recommended for enhanced safety though must be wired into fused spur socket by qualified electrician with any old gas cooker supply capped off. Double-cavity with internal grill recommended for optimum usefulness. Should have cooker hood above. (For more than five tenants a second cooker will also be required).
- Sink needs to have hot and cold running water taps. Provide a plughole strainer to prevent food waste going down sink. (For more than five tenants a second sink will also be required).
- Microwave
- Kettle
- Toaster
- Fridge provision – a minimum of one shelf per tenant.
- Freezer provision – a minimum of one shelf per tenant. (General tip – for happiest tenants, put largest fridge/freezer possible into property as they like to buy food in bulk to save money).
- Kitchen should provide one cupboard per tenant not including cleaning materials cupboard under sink.
- Kitchen fire door required on every kitchen or kitchen/diner if combined.
- Rubbish bin (should be large enough to take a bin liner).
- Mop and bucket
- Broom
- Dustpan and brush

*Please ensure all appliances are replaced with *A-rated energy efficiency appliances when they need replacing.*

**Study/bedroom**
- Number on door
- Lockable door with thumbturn on inside
- 3' wide single strong bed base with headboard (not cabin or child size).
- 3' wide single firm quality mattress + single mattress protector (Please note: mattresses must be bought brand new).
- Wardrobe (not canvas or plastic or a moveable rail).
- Chest of drawers (not canvas or plastic)
  - Wardrobe/drawers combi unit acceptable in smaller rooms.
- Book shelves or book case
- Bedside table (or shelf near bed where lamp can safely sit in smaller rooms).
- Proper desk with drawers and/or shelves (not small tables).
- Strong, upholstered desk chair
- Wastebin
- Mirror (can be on inside of wardrobe)
- Bedside lamp
- Corkboard or fireproof cork tile covered wall
- Working curtains or blind (blackout quality in bedrooms to aid sound sleep).
WHAT TO PROVIDE
CHECKLIST

☐ Fixed radiator or wall heater with working temperature control.

☐ Lockable opening windows (bottom half of glass should be frosted in ground floor bedrooms).

☐ At least two double (or four single) electrical plug sockets to minimise electrical overload and trailing cables.

Bathroom/shower room

☐ Roller blind
☐ Bath mat
☐ Toilet brush
☐ Toilet roll holder
☐ Sufficient shelf or cabinet space for toiletries
☐ Towel rails in all bathrooms/shower rooms, preferably heated.
☐ Towel rings by all wash hand basins.
☐ Soap holder or dish for all wash hand basins.
☐ Mirror, preferably with shaver light above.
☐ Lock on door. Indicator bolt recommended so that when bathroom/WC is in use other tenants can clearly see room is ‘Engaged’ and do not bang on door or try to force door.

☐ All bathrooms or WCs with glass in the door need to have internal blinds for privacy. Obscure glass is not private enough with the light on.

☐ Baths and showers should be professionally sealed and/or grouted with no gaps or mould around. Shower cubicle doors should be robust and snug-fitting with no gaps.

☐ Shower curtain (rather than screen) needed for bath/shower arrangements.

☐ All bathrooms, shower rooms and WCs need to be of adequate size for comfortable changing and dressing and to keep clothes and towels dry when bathing. (re. WC provision, please note that one internal WC is required per five residents.)

☐ Extractor fan
☐ IP-rated bathroom light
☐ Must have adequate heating and ventilation.
☐ Should have waterproof flooring which is easy to clean.

Fire safety

☐ All kitchens need to be professionally fitted with a self-closing half hour fire door. If glass is incorporated it needs to be fire rated or Georgian-wired glass. The fire door should be painted with fire retardant paint.

☐ All kitchens need to have a fire blanket and a domestic fire extinguisher fixed to the wall.

☐ All kitchens should have a heat detector installed.

☐ Each hallway and landing needs to have a smoke detector, preferably hard-wired and interconnected with the others in the property.

☐ In larger properties of more than two storeys there should be a full integrated fire alarm system installed comprising a smoke detector in each study bedroom as well as in each communal area, hallway and landing with heat detector in kitchen and connected to an addressable fire alarm panel in the hallway.

☐ Emergency lighting should be provided if property is more than two storeys high or of unusual layout with insufficient natural light available.
WHAT TO PROVIDE
CHECKLIST

☐ Properties with fire alarm systems need to have a designated fire alarm company contracted to inspect them twice-yearly, updating a log book kept in the house. The fire alarm company may call the Housing Office directly to arrange testing dates.

☐ Students should have emergency number to contact company directly with any fire alarm problems.

☐ All fire escape routes (i.e. landings, hallways, lobbies, corridors and porches) need to be kept clear.

☐ When updating the electrical wiring, please fit an RCD to the new fuse box to increase safety. 

*Please note that while the University will check that smoke detectors work during inspections (arranging for electrician to visit if not), we are unable to issue fire safety certificates.*

Security

Landlords should check their insurance policy for security requirements.

The University of Sussex requirements are as follows:

☐ All accessible windows should have window locks, preferably push button locks so there are no keys to go missing.

☐ Front and back doors should be robust in construction. A five-lever mortice lock is recommended in addition to a euro cylinder style lock for front door unless door is a double-glazed unit. Thumb turns should be fitted at the back of both doors for easy exit.

☐ Internal slide bolts can be added to back door for additional security as long as easy to open by tenants.

☐ Bedroom door locks should be rollerball night latch cylinders (i.e. Yale) but must have thumb turns inside for quick release.

☐ There is no need for any locks to be ‘high security’ as full addresses are not put on our keyrings.

☐ All ground floor windows should have bottom glass panes frosted or voile-curtained so potential thieves cannot see in but tenants can see out.

☐ Ensure working exterior light in front door porch area/PIR light for security in rear garden or yard if there is side access.

☐ Ensure all side and other gates are operational and border walls and fences are in good order.

Meters

☐ All meters should be located in accessible places (i.e. not in bedrooms or behind large fridges) and be credit meters. PAYG can cause inconvenience as the students will be required to visit the Housing Office regularly to organise refunds. Please ensure Housing Office have opening gas and electric meter readings at start of contract to transfer accounts to University dual fuel account for duration of contract.

☐ Avoid installation of Smart Meters as these result in peak billing for peak times and meter cost incorporation into the bills, despite advertising to the contrary.

☐ Avoid water meters if possible as these also tend to result in higher bills for multi-occupational properties.
WHAT TO PROVIDE
CHECKLIST

General

☐ All properties need to have a carbon monoxide detector fitted in the vicinity of the boiler.
☐ All properties should be warm and well insulated.
☐ All fireplaces should be covered and any stoves or open gas fires disconnected to prevent use.
☐ 3’ x 2’ noticeboard for emergency contact details, rubbish disposal and safety info required in communal area of each house (can be hallway if there is no space elsewhere).
☐ Provide sufficient coat hooks/shoe storage in either hallway/cloakroom.
☐ Ensure adequate lighting throughout house.
☐ One pendant bulb light may not be enough to illuminate a whole kitchen or a large student room in which case multi-bulb fittings should be substituted, installed by a qualified electrician.
☐ Bathrooms need to be well-lit for safety when shaving or have a separate shaver light above mirror.
☐ All lights should be fitted with light shades.
☐ Bathroom lights should be IP-rated (i.e. waterproof).
☐ All kitchen and bathroom/WC windows should be fitted with blinds, irrespective of opaque glass.
☐ Each study/bedroom lock (see Security) needs to have thumb turn on inside to facilitate easy exit.
☐ All study/bedroom doors need to be numbered (start at bottom of house and work up).

☐ All door handles, knobs and locks in the house should be robust and properly fitted. It should be impossible for tenants to accidentally lock or door jam themselves into any part of the house due to a loose door knob coming off.
☐ Roller blinds needed in all kitchens and bathrooms (obscure glass not sufficient) and blinds/curtains also needed for communal areas where neighbours overlooked. In addition for any bathrooms or WC’s with glass in the doors or walls.
☐ All internal and external doors need to fit properly and be easy to open and close with no gaps around door frames.
☐ Provide 1 x working vacuum cleaner and bags to go with if not bagless variety.
☐ Provide 1 x ironing board with cover.
☐ Provide 1 x working iron.
☐ Replace shower curtains, bath mats and front and back door mats yearly.
☐ Ensure understairs areas free from rubbish or defunct furniture and vacuum cleaners.
☐ Ensure all built-in cupboards are fully useable and in good decorative order internally and externally.
☐ All staircases need to be solid-construction staircases with bannisters attached.
☐ Padlock unconverted loft areas for safety reasons and to prevent damage to property.
☐ Prevent access to roof areas (i.e. via windows) for safety reasons and to avoid damage to property.
☐ Provide a property file containing instructions for appliances, shower and boiler.
WHAT TO PROVIDE

CLEANING AND GARDENING

While the property and garden are required to be clean, neat and tidy when a house is taken on, during the contract, cleaners will attend the property to clean communal areas once a fortnight. Tenants are expected to clean up after themselves when cooking or showering and do their own washing up and rubbish disposal. Tenants are also responsible for their own rooms. Vacuum cleaners and cleaning apparatus therefore need to be provided at each property. All properties are inspected once per semester with appropriate action taken and tenants notified if a house is found to have cleaning or other issues.

A gardening contractor will attend monthly between May and October to undertake basic garden maintenance (namely weeding, grass cutting or yard sweeping and any removal of tenant rubbish) and as needed through the winter. If any extras are required (i.e. hedge cutting, bush reduction or tree trimming, these will be chargeable to the landlord, though we are happy to obtain a quotation for the landlord).

When the tenants vacate the house at the end of their contract the property will receive a single contract clean throughout, any rubbish will be removed and the garden will be visited.
ABOUT THE TENANTS

Our students

Your property will be occupied only by full-time University of Sussex students who are allocated by the University so no student viewings are necessary. We try to have separate properties for postgraduates and undergraduates wherever possible and maintain a mix of genders.

When students move in at the start of contract a Residential Advisor will organise a ‘kitchen meeting’ for the house to discuss communal living and welcome events to help them settle in. Each student is provided with a Resident’s Handbook, which is full of helpful advice about Headlease Housing and communal living. It is part of their tenancy agreement to report any maintenance problems directly to the Housing Office and also to be considerate to housemates and neighbours.

Full-time students are currently exempt from paying council tax nationwide so each student needs to register their exemption with the local council.

Bills are included in tenant rent.

Students are responsible for purchasing their own TV licences.

Light bulbs: while some students will replace the odd light bulb themselves, this is not something we can contractually insist on as they are not insured to touch the electrics and may not know how to change light bulbs, particularly if they are international students. The Housing Office therefore replaces any bulbs we are made aware of during the course of tenancy.

When tenants vacate, typically in late August or early September (landlords will be informed of dates in our landlord end-of-student-contract information email sent early summer), tenants should remove all their belongings from the property. There is no arrangement for storage either prior to contract or after contract and students should put belongings into a storage facility if they are returning to University the following year. Students also need to return all keys to the Housing Office upon departure and should not leave keys in properties or for friends (or landlords) to return!

Where undergraduate students depart after 39 weeks, the University will re-let these Headlease rooms to summer conferences and visitors.
REPAIRS

Maintenance and insurance

MAINTENANCE

The University will cover initial call-outs, investigations of reported problems and minor maintenance such as replacing leaky tap washers and light bulbs or unblocking blocked drains whilst tenants are in residence. We will also cover any damage caused by tenant negligence or deliberately (which may also be subject to disciplinary action). Anything else is subject to the obtaining of quotations and liaising with landlords to arrange. We aim to minimise works to property whilst our tenants are in residence as they are entitled to ‘peaceful and quiet enjoyment’ of their home. The exceptions to this are in the event of an emergency (see page 21), when the tenants report a problem or if we find a problem in the course of the property inspection. Inspections on all properties take place once per semester.

LANDLORD ACCESS

Landlords are welcome to visit their properties during contract but are required to provide 48 working hours notice of their visit to the Housing Office so we can give tenants written notice. Please also state the reason and time of visit as tenants may wish to be present. We ask that you keep visits to a minimum however and respect tenants’ legal right to ‘peaceful and quiet enjoyment’ of their home whilst under contract. In addition you will be alerted by the Housing Office if any serious issues arise (see above).

ABOUT LANDLORD REIMBURSEMENTS

We request landlords to send all agreed bills and invoices to the Housing Office in a timely manner to avoid backlogs and to assist the Housing Office in administrative processes and prompt reimbursement. Please note that the end of each University financial year is 31 July so all reimbursements for the preceding financial year need to be processed before this date. If you have a number of properties with us, please ensure each bill is marked with that supply address so we know which house is which when processing. For any other agreed reimbursements, please ensure Housing Office have copies of all receipts and invoices as the Accounts Office require these for audit purposes.

INSURANCE TIPS

Please advise your insurance company of all property improvements you make. This is not only required by them but fire safety, security and electrical safety improvements (and even replacement windows) may result in a significant discount to you!

Always have property insured for its market value if the worst should happen. It is easy to become underinsured if you don’t keep up with your current property value.
Emergency situations

In the event of a property emergency, the tenants should contact the Housing Office immediately who will take the appropriate remedial action and also notify the landlord of the situation.

If the Tenant is unable to contact the landlord, or the Housing Office is closed, the Tenant reserves the right to instruct any emergency repair up to the value stated in the Landlord contract within five working days and re-charge the landlord.
Preparing/refurbishing student properties

Whether new to student letting or more experienced, the following tips can help future-proof your property as housing legislation advances and also save you money and inconvenience in the long-term. Moreover the right improvements can add value to your property when it comes to re-sale.

It may seem an obvious consideration but multiple-occupational properties will contain multiple individuals breathing, showering, cooking, boiling kettles, drying clothes etc. With the best tenants in the world this means a LOT of condensation in winter so install trickle vent double-glazing/make sure all windows are openable, put extractor fans in bathrooms and kitchens, install a tumble dryer if space permits and always make sure they have a washing line or rotary dryer available in the back garden or yard. The University provides mould prevention information to tenants to inform them what measures they should take.

Multiple occupational properties are also subject to far greater levels of ‘fair wear and tear’ than a domestic family let. Furthermore students come in all shapes and sizes, from those who could pass for a 12 year old to those built like wrestlers, so it is worth investing in heavy duty contract furniture (i.e. hotel standard). This can either be obtained brand new or from companies who specialise in selling ex hotel furniture. As long as furniture is ‘fit for purpose’ and compliant with safety standards, we do not insist it is bought brand new except for mattresses.

Ensure all replacement appliances and boilers installed are *A-rated energy efficiency appliances.

MYSTERIOUS SWITCHES

Label all switches in house for heating, hot water, fire alarm etc so there are no mysterious switches and tenants know what does what as all properties are different. Remove any defunct switches, boxes or other old wiring or hardware to prevent confusion. Many an unnecessary call out has arisen simply because a tenant has accidentally pushed a wrong switch and turned a boiler off! Label stop-cock location too.

INSULATION

Prior to 1937 there was no cavity wall insulation. Therefore older properties may need damp proof course injections or other damp proofing. If in doubt, seek professional advice from a reputable damp proofing company.

NOISE REDUCTION

Carpet is recommended on stairs and for upstairs bedrooms to reduce noise (cushion floor vinyl in bathrooms). Acoustic underlay beneath carpets is also a good idea, particularly if your property is a flat situated above another flat or sound travels easily in the property.
FUTURE-PROOF YOUR PROPERTY

Even several people talking late at night can lead to neighbour complaints, particularly if tenants do not have a lounge to congregate in or the party wall is very thin between your property and the neighbouring property. If party walls are thin, consider a wall soundproofing solution which does not compromise living space. These need not be expensive and may prevent a lot of issues in the future. Check all doors are solid and do not slam or squeak. Finally remember that noise insulation is also insulation and will help with a property's energy efficiency rating and the cost of heating bills.

BOILERS AND HEATING

Ensure water and electrical supplies to the property are sufficient for the number of tenants who will be using them and the number of water and electric devices to be run, sometimes simultaneously.

Boilers need to be of suitable capacity to serve the number of tenants living in the property. Consider the number of radiators to be heated plus the possibility of more than one tenant showering or using taps at once. Will your current system be able to handle this level of demand without frequent breakdowns? Seek advice from a plumbing and heating expert. If you need to upgrade the boiler anyway, you could save money in the long term by considering various types of boiler (not necessarily gas). Boilers need to be installed in sensible places and professionally boxed in so no pipes and wires are showing.

Put up simple instructions for boiler/thermostat use, to enable tenants to set the heating themselves. Alternatively you can invest in a lockable programmer/timer switch so the property can be set at 21°C over the winter to provide comfortable temperature without excess wear and tear on the boiler by being on too high for extended periods. Radiators can still be turned off in individual rooms by any tenants who want cooler temperature. If you have a separate immersion heater, label it. If you are updating to a combi boiler could the old water tank cupboard be converted to an extra airing/storage cupboard space? Or would that be the best location to install new boiler out of the way?

All study/bedroom radiators need to have working radiator knobs, preferably thermostatic controls, so the temperature can be individually controlled in rooms. Thermostatic is also a worthwhile investment as it saves money on bills and wear and tear on the system.

Hot water supply needs to be sufficient for the number of people likely to be taking showers in quick succession. Consider installing a pump if your property suffers from low water pressure. A pressurised hot water vessel is also worth considering for a property which needs ample hot water supply for more than three tenants and can be run separate to boiler.

Avoid installing boilers or house thermostats in student rooms. This is not fair to the occupant whose room it is in (noisy and intrusive) and can cause problems if the central heating fails and the room is locked.

Block any fireplaces or get a gas-registered engineer to cap off gas fires. Tenants should only be using central heating or wall-fixed storage heaters.

Please note that boilers should be wired into a fused spur by a qualified electrician and not plugged into a standard socket.
FUTURE-PROOF YOUR PROPERTY

Brighton is notorious for being a hard-water area. Installing an electrolytic scale inhibitor for around £150 on the cold water supply can pay dividends in preventing scaled up boilers, showers, washing machines and pipes.

INTERNET

Please try to ensure all router connections are in communal areas if possible as it can be very disruptive if the internet connection in someone’s bedroom stops working, particularly if they are away and have locked their room! The University will generally open an account directly with its wifi supplier for duration of contract unless there are technical or coverage issues which mean the landlord needs to open an account with an alternative company and then send bills to us for reimbursement.

PROPERTY BOOK

Prepare a simple ‘property book’ with all the specific details tenants need to know about your property as the Housing Office can only issue a standard Tenant Handbook containing general advice applicable to all properties. Add location of stop cock, boiler, fuseboard (and all meters) in property book. Ensure stop cock works as sometimes they rust into position if they have not been used in a long time.

DECORATING

If you can afford it go for vinyl silk as it will last longer and be wipeable. Don’t be afraid of using a colour here and there. Students like bright colours. Use condensation-proof paint in bathrooms and kitchens. Keep finishes the same on each wall to avoid scruffy patchwork effect and get professional decorators in for the best and longest lasting finish.

CURTAINS OR BLINDS

These should be provided for every window. Blackout blinds and curtains are needed for study bedrooms to enable restful sleep.

HALLWAY

Provide a set of strong coat hooks, one or two per tenant and a large noticeboard, no less than 3’ x 2’ for tenant and safety information.

FLOORING

We recommend tiles or cushion floor vinyl in kitchen. Cushion floor vinyl is best in bathrooms and WCs, carpet in bedrooms/lounges, landings and stairs. Laminate or cushion floor vinyl works best in hallways or ground floor areas of heavy use.

STUDY BEDROOMS

If letting to students consider lining one wall with fire retardant cork tiles and painting it into room colour. This gives them a large area to put up posters to their hearts’ content and can deter them from damaging other walls in their attempts to make their rooms feel ‘more homely’. While wash hand basins can be useful in larger rooms in larger properties, they should be avoided in smaller rooms where they compromise limited space.

LIGHTING

Needs to be sufficient in all areas for safety as well as for living and studying so please avoid energy-saving bulbs which take up to ten minutes to reach full power (as the cheapest types do). Conversely we don’t require banks of dichroic spotlights everywhere which constantly need changing or fiddly under-cupboard lighting
FUTURE-PROOF YOUR PROPERTY

in kitchens. The most useful light in kitchens and bathrooms is a ceiling bar or cluster light with four spot bulbs each directed at a different side of the kitchen or bathroom so all areas of the room are lighted. Bar/cluster lights are both inexpensive and can add a designer touch to a kitchen. In addition if one bulb goes out the whole kitchen is not plunged into darkness as it is with a single light. Ditto the bathroom should offer more than one bulb though bathroom lights should be IP-rated (ie waterproof). This can be a combo of ceiling light and shaver light above mirror or a light fitting with more than one bulb in. Please avoid fittings with highly-specialist bulbs or which can only be bought online. If you have a large lounge or bedroom with a single pendant bulb, please replace with a multi-bulb fitting or add uplighters around the room. Use lightshades on all lights. Lightshades can be very cheaply obtained these days and naked bulbs look awful, suggesting a property lacking in basic TLC.

BATHROOMS/SHOWER ROOMS/WCs

Indicator bolt recommended so that when bathroom/WC is in use other tenants can clearly see room is ‘Engaged’ and do not bang on door or try to force door.

Decorate in wipeable condensation-proof paint for maximum decorative life.

Install cushion floor vinyl in bathrooms/WC’s, not carpet. Have it laid first before sanitaryware to prevent future leaks going underneath flooring. Seal around edges.

Install a robust shower cubicle with doors opening or folding inwards or sliding to avoid water dripping on floor when opening cubicle. Advanced Showers or similar quality recommended.

Shower screens over baths are often too small to prevent water escape over edge of bath. Shower curtains are often cheaper and more effective, though ensure long enough to hang inside bath properly. If there is a window on one side it can be a good idea to put shower curtains and rails on both sides to protect window from excessive moisture.

One of the top student complaints is weak shower pressure so install a good quality shower such as a Mira Sport. Seek advice from a qualified plumber about the best shower for your heating system and if water flow is naturally weak, consider installing a water pump to boost.

Install WCs with lever handles as push-button flushes are weaker so more prone to blocking and have more parts to go wrong. They can also jam if anything falls into them (eg a fingernail). Install WC seats with stainless steel hinges for greater longevity.

GLAZING

When upgrading double glazing, choose keyless push button lock handles (to prevent keys being necessarygoing missing). Please also choose trickle vent double glazing to boost ventilation. All rooms require at least one reasonably-sized opening/lockable window.

In a listed building, seek advice from Brighton and Hove City Council as you may need to invest in replica windows to replace period windows. Brighton bolts are a good period security solution for sash windows and do not require keys.

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Consider wet wall panels rather than tiles for bathroom walls to minimise leaks, mould and future maintenance. Use same material to waterproof bathroom window sills.

Splashbacks are needed for basins.

Avoid macerators (such as saniflow) if possible as these have a tendency to block easily.

Avoid shallow wash hand basins which splash water onto floor. Even if space is limited, always choose a deep basin of good design.

Lever taps last longer than cross tops and are easier to turn off.

Copper piping is best for leak prevention as plastic piping is not always expertly installed and will not last as long.

Light fitting should be IP-rated bathroom fitting (i.e., waterproof), but try to avoid the styles where it is difficult to change the bulbs/buy that type of bulbs in the local shops.

Timed extractor or humidistat fans recommended, even if opening window present. Please note that ground floor bath or shower rooms are particularly prone to condensation and mould and may benefit from wet wall solutions rather than tiles to give moisture fewer places to settle (similar cost).

Window sills should be fitted with a PVC or similar covering to prevent repeated redecoration being necessary.

**KITCHENS**

When upgrading a kitchen have plans drawn up by an experienced kitchen fitter to avoid poor layouts and enable best use of the space, particularly if limited. Cookers should not be installed under wall cupboards or next to fridges or freezers for example and hobs ideally need a cooker hood above and proper splashback behind. Electric cookers recommended for enhanced tenant safety but must be wired into fused spur sockets by a qualified electrician with former gas cooker supply capped off by gas-registered plumber. Avoid installing induction hotplates which require special pots and pans, or any device with complicated instructions to use.

A money saving tip is to install free-standing appliances rather than built-in. Not only are they cheaper but they are easier to replace if they go wrong without leaving any gaps where there may be a size variance between old and replacement appliances.

Ensure ample socket provision, and adequate lighting. A single bulb is not adequate for a kitchen. Change for multi-bulb fitting so if one bulb goes out tenants are not in darkness, which also has safety implications.

Decorate in wipeable condensation-proof paint for maximum decorative life.

Choose robust and simple-to-use appliances. A Bosch washing machine will last longer than a Beko. Research safest and most reliable makes.

You can never install a large enough fridge/freezer! Minimum capacity in each needs to be one shelf per tenant in fridge and freezer.

Appliances should be contained within the kitchen/and or utility rooms and not sited in corridors.

Sinks will require a splashback and a draining board and will need hot and cold running water.

One food cupboard per tenant will be needed (not counting under-sink cleaning cupboard).
FUTURE-PROOF YOUR PROPERTY

Robust construction recommended. Double-screw handles recommended as single screw knobs often come off easily.

Adequate and hygienic worktop space is necessary for food preparation. Solid will last a great deal longer than laminate and will prevent scorch marks and missing chips and prove easier to clean. There are many synthetic solid work tops on the market which are just as durable and attractive as granite these days but at much lower cost. Some can even be moulded on site to fit which provides the best hygienic seal/upstand to tiles or splashback and looks great too.

Try not to take up half a kitchen with a boiler installation and box unsightly pipes in or blend boiler cupboard with other kitchen cupboards if there is no choice in location. Boilers also need to be wired into a fused spur by a qualified electrician and not just plugged in to a mains socket.

LOFT CONVERSIONS

Built-in furniture is best for loft conversions, particularly when ceilings are liable to slope in certain areas. Depending on the size of the loft some landlords opt for a large room with an en-suite or two standard rooms with a shared shower room/WC. Either way, additional bathroom facilities are likely to be needed if extra bedrooms are added.

All loft conversions MUST meet Building Control regulations and be tall enough to walk around in and be suitable for use as study/bedrooms with desk, so consult the relevant council planning department from the outset. Get plans drawn up by a qualified architect with loft experience to ensure compliance with regulations. The space may prove to be legally unlettable otherwise. Avoid paddle stairs to loft rooms.

OUTSIDE

Chimneys and drains

Chimney pot cover grilles will prevent birds and debris from flying or falling down chimneys into disused fireplaces to cause problems. This can be combined with a general roof, flashing and gutter check prior to contract. Drain grills will prevent leaf fall blocking drains. Both are to be recommended as preventative measures.

Infestation prevention

Ensure there are no gaps, holes or missing ventilation grills around exterior of house where rodents can enter.

Gardens

While it is not against student tenancy agreements, the University does not encourage barbecues or outdoor socialising in residential areas off-campus as this can lead to neighbour complaints. Therefore all that is needed in garden areas is that they are safe and easy to maintain and offer clothes drying facilities in the form of a clothes line or rotary dryer, and if space permits, a shed suitable for bicycle storage. Boundary walls, fences and side gates also need to be in good order.

Note: Presuming good general condition at the outset of letting, the National Landlord Association recommends that 10% of rental profits should be reinvested in each property each year.
A landlord I once knew, Mr G, decorated each bedroom in a pretty pastel shade and installed a good quality carpet in more practical darker shade. Curtains and lightshades were inexpensive but lovingly contrasted. Furniture was old, solid, revamped pine – painted white with new knobs on – and an L-shaped sofa graced the communal area. Mr G’s properties were practical to live in with period features left intact and the odd plum-coloured bathroom suite still performing sterling service, albeit with a modern electric shower above the bath. In short, his properties were homely and welcoming and passed the Housing Officer acid test of ‘would I live here if I were a student?’ with flying colours.

As a personal policy, it worked. In the five years I knew him I never knew Mr G have a badly-behaved tenant, much though there will always be the odd very untidy one. On the contrary, he almost put a Housing Office out of work as we seldom heard a peep out of his tenants with any problems and they tended to renew their contracts with his properties each year for the remainder of their university career.

Mr G possessed the ideal blend of being a caring landlord who regarded students as he might his own son or daughter, yet who was canny enough to spend money in the right places to ensure he seldom had a complaint or a void, but without blowing the budget to do so, or replacing things until he needed to, and all while remaining compliant within the HMO strictures of that area of the country.

I often joked with my colleagues about cloning him. Failing the necessary technology just yet though, we are happy to settle for landlord emulation to a Mr G.

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