Aberystwyth University operates a registration scheme for private sector accommodation for our students, whereby the Accommodation Office keeps details of available properties which are regularly checked to ensure they comply with a number of necessary standards such as the Mandatory Licensing Scheme, the Additional Licensing Scheme and gas safety requirements. The Accommodation Office requires landlords to re-apply for registration of their properties on an annual basis.

The Accommodation Office can therefore assist students who are looking for a place to live in the private sector. Details of vacancies in private sector properties that are registered with Aberystwyth University are advertised on the Accommodation Office website: [http://accommodation-online.aber.ac.uk/private/](http://accommodation-online.aber.ac.uk/private/)

Students may approach the Accommodation Office if they require any information, help or advice regarding private sector accommodation. Accommodation Office staff, for example, are able to look over private sector tenancy agreements on behalf of students and offer support or direction in situations where students may be experiencing difficulties in their private sector accommodation.

To assist our students further, the Accommodation Office has produced this Private Sector Housing Guide, which is designed to outline a number of key areas for students to consider when they are looking for and living in private sector accommodation. This guide is divided into the following sections:

1. Types of Private Accommodation
2. Get Organised!
3. Viewing Properties
4. Inventory
5. Your Responsibilities and Housing Rights
6. Tenancy Agreements/Contracts
7. Deposits/Bonds
8. Utility Bills
9. Gas, Electrical and Fire Safety Advice
10. Safety and Security Advice

Introduction

**Things to consider when viewing properties**

- Is the property licensed with Ceredigion County Council? It is a legal requirement for certain types of rented property to be licensed with the local authority. Does the landlord have a licence? If in doubt, check with the Accommodation Office.
- Have you seen the current Gas Safety Certificate? Before you move in, the landlord is legally obliged to produce the Gas Safety Certificate to show that all gas appliances have been inspected and tested within the last 12 months.
- Does the landlord have certification for the electrical installation? Properties that are part of the Mandatory Licensing scheme operated by Ceredigion County Council are required to have a Periodic Inspection Report for the electrical installation to show that the electrical installation has been inspected within the last 5 years.
- Is there any fire detection equipment? Are there smoke alarms, fire extinguishers and fire doors? Do they work properly?
- Does each room in the property have a clear escape route?

**Things to remember when you move in**

- Do remember to: Make sure that everybody in the property has a set of keys. Ensure that, if necessary, the landlord supplies keys for any window locks. Ensure that the previous tenants have given all their keys back. If the property has a burglar alarm, ask the landlord to change the code. Never leave the main door(s) unlocked even if you are at home.
- Do remember not to: Let contractors or anyone else into the property without seeing their identification. Leave the property unsecure. Make sure the house is locked, all windows are closed and that the property is secure whenever it is empty.
1. Types of Private Accommodation

**Shared houses and flats**
The most popular type of accommodation is for a number of student friends to share a house or a flat and to live together as a group. Each student has his or her own bedroom and they share communal rooms such as the living room, kitchen and bathroom. Each year, there is high demand for shared houses and flats, beginning in November/December, when groups of returning students start to search for suitable properties.

The majority of shared houses are for groups of 4 to 6 students. There is also a reasonable supply of smaller houses, for example for groups of 2 and 3. However, there are not so many houses/flats for larger groups of 7 to 9 students.

**Flat shares (single rooms)**
Flat shares refer to whole houses and flats where the bedrooms are let separately to individual students. Each student has his or her 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. It is often easier to find vacancies in flat shares later in the year, from the beginning of the summer and onwards.

**Bedsits and Studio Flats**
Houses that have been converted into smaller self-contained units for single students are popular and there is good demand from students who prefer greater independence and privacy. Each unit is let separately and consists of, for example, a single bedroom with a kitchen area and a shared bathroom.

**Self-contained flats**
This is another extremely popular type of housing for single students and for married students. Demand for self-contained flats is often quite high. A self-contained flat may have 1 or 2 bedrooms with a separate living room, kitchen and bathroom.

Smoke alarms
An average of 5 people aged 18-24 are killed or injured by fires each day and you are more than twice as likely to die in a fire if you do not have a working smoke alarm. It is therefore essential that you make sure you have smoke alarms in your property and that you check them regularly.

Certain properties, houses that are part of the County Council’s Mandatory Licensing Scheme, are required to have automatic fire detection systems, fire doors and emergency lighting. If you are concerned about fire safety in your property please telephone Ceredigion County Council, 01970 633369/79, who will be pleased to offer you further advice.

**Fire Safety Tips**
In additional to the advice concerning the importance of Smoke Alarms, the following tips will help to ensure you stay safe from fire in your student accommodation:

- Take extra care with cigarettes and smoking materials and never smoke in bed
- Check your furniture has the fire resistant permanent label
- Plan and practise an escape route with your housemates
- If a fire starts, get out, stay out and call 999

Do Not:
- Prevent your landlord from entering your house (after giving 24 hours notice) to service any fire extinguishers/fire detection system
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- Block any corridor, landing or hallway with bikes, furniture, plants, traffic cones etc.
- Prop open your bedroom or kitchen door or disconnect any door closers
- Set off any fire extinguishers just to see what happens – tampering with fire safety equipment is a criminal offence

Gas, Electrical and Fire Safety Advice Continued...
Types of Private Accommodation Continued...

Accommodation with resident owners
Accommodation with a resident owner may also be known as accommodation with a family although a variety of people (students, professional people and families) may offer this accommodation. The normal arrangement is for the resident owner to provide exclusive use of a bedroom with the shared use of the kitchen, bathroom and possibly the living room. This accommodation is preferred by older students (postgraduates) who are looking for a quiet place to live and it can often provide good quality accommodation at a reasonable price. There is also flexibility for both the owner and the student, for example with the period of notice. The period of notice will depend on the arrangements over rent. A student who pays rent every 4 weeks would normally need to give 4 weeks notice from the date when the rent is due. In these circumstances, the student will not be entering into a fixed term arrangement for the entire academic year: the normal arrangement is flexible i.e. every calendar month or every 4 weeks.

Accommodation for families and couples
A small number of properties are available for student couples and families. These properties range from self-contained flats, or apartments with 1 or 2 bedrooms, to larger properties with 2 or 3 bedrooms. However, the supply of private accommodation for student couples and families is relatively limited and families with 3 or more children may find it difficult and expensive to secure suitable private sector accommodation.

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You Should:
• Open doors and windows to let the gas escape
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• Turn the gas supply off
• not use matches or naked flames
• not smoke
• not turn electrical switches on or off, or use a doorbell

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Electrical Safety
Dangerous electrical appliances or damaged sockets can cause fire or serious injury. Although there is no legal requirement for the landlord/agent to carry out regular checks they are responsible for ensuring that the installations and appliances are safe to use.

What Are The Warning Signs?
• Broken plug sockets
• Plugs that get hot when they are used
• Sparks from electrical appliances/sockets
• Exposed wiring

Please note that properties which are Licensed with the County Council are required to have a Periodic Inspection Report for the fixed electrical wiring/installations.

Fire Safety Advice
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2. Get Organised!

Depending on how organised you are, the process of finding a house can be either exciting or daunting. Our advice on the way to make house hunting exciting is:

- **Allow yourself plenty of time to look at properties.** This stops you running up against deadlines and avoids any panic.
- **Be well equipped:** for example, take a paper and pen with you.
- **Know what you want, what you can afford, and which area you like,** before you start looking at houses.
- **Seek advice on the legal issues before you start looking.** For example, read this guide thoroughly and be prepared to ask landlords questions about their tenancy agreements.
- **Make sure the people you are house hunting with are patient and do not expect to take the first house they see just because they do not want to look anymore.**

**House Mates**

You may think that after having lived in University Residences with someone, you know them pretty well. However, think again! Sharing a house together can bring out people’s irritating little habits: their inability to wash up or operate a vacuum cleaner, for example, can become major issues. So, the smallest things in the world can become the most important and the most irritating issues.

Do not despair: sharing a house with your friends can be brilliant, but just take care. Certainly do not rush into sharing a house with people whom you do not know really well. If you sign a tenancy agreement too early, you can be legally committed to a property and to sharing with people you do not really want to. If you all fall out before you are due to move in, you may well not be able to get out of your tenancy agreement. So choose the right people to live with and you will have a great time together.

**Make a Smart Move**

Don’t panic! It happens every year when stories start to circulate in November and December: “all of the good properties will be gone by Christmas”. So make a smart move and avoid rushing in too early to rent a house that is not right for you.

For further advice see our publication *Ten Top Tips* guide to Looking for Private Sector Accommodation.

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**Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998**

The above regulations place on landlords the duty to ensure that all gas appliances, pipe work and flues are maintained in a safe condition. Each gas appliance and/or flue must be checked for safety at intervals of no more than 12 months by an engineer registered with the Gas Safe Register. The landlord must then show a copy of the Gas Safety Certificate to existing tenants within 28 days of it being completed. The landlord is also required to show the Gas Safety Certificate to prospective tenants before they move into the accommodation. Further information is available from: http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/

Gas appliances must be safe and have sufficient ventilation in order to prevent a gas leak or carbon monoxide poisoning, which can kill in minutes. Remember, if you think a gas appliance is faulty, turn it off and let your landlord know immediately.

**In an emergency:**

- if you smell gas or think there might be a gas leak, turn off the gas at the meter, extinguish naked flames, open windows and leave the property. Seek medical advice if you feel unwell. Call the Gas Emergency freephone number 0800 111 999.

**Carbon Monoxide**

Carbon Monoxide is a gas that is highly dangerous to people and animals and is produced by appliances that burn fossil fuels such as gas or coal. Even an appliance that has been serviced regularly can produce Carbon Monoxide.

NEVER COVER OR BLOCK AIR VENTS. Even if a property has a Gas Safety Certificate problems can still occur. Carbon monoxide is difficult to detect because it is:

- Colourless
- Odourless
- Tasteless

Look Out For The Danger Signs

- Soot/staining marks on or around the appliance.
- A yellow or orange lazy flame - not crisp and blue.
- Condensation in the room where the appliance is installed.
3. Viewing Properties

Private Accommodation Checklist

Use the **Accommodation Checklist**, available from the Accommodation Office, to help you search for a suitable property that will meet all of your needs. Never view a private sector property alone, always take someone along with you.

Even if you follow this list, the best reference for the landlord and property will come from the existing tenants. Try to speak to the tenants to get an idea of what it is like to live in the property and whether the landlord has been prompt in responding to requests for repairs etc.

Consider that in the private sector your rental payments are likely to be in the region of £2500 to £3500 per year, exclusive of bills. This is a very significant amount of money so make sure that you choose a property wisely.

Finally, if you agree anything verbally with the landlord, for example items of new furniture, redecoration or repairs, make sure that you get these in writing (ideally in the tenancy agreement) and signed by the landlord along with a note of the date that the items will be attended to.
4. **Inventory**

Students sometimes complain of problems regarding the return of deposits (bonds) when tenancy agreements come to an end. Normally these problems relate to disputes between the landlord and tenant(s) regarding the change in the condition of the property and the contents over the period of the tenancy.

Therefore when you first move into a property it is essential to make a detailed inventory (list) of the contents of the house and what condition they are in. All items in the property, except your personal belongings, should be included in the inventory and there must be a clear indication of what condition everything is in, for example:

**Living room carpet:** brand new

or:

**Microwave:** 2 scratches to glass door.

When the inventory is complete both you and your landlord should sign and date the inventory and keep a copy each.

At the end of your tenancy you then need to re-examine the property and check all of the items on the inventory. If necessary you could take photos as evidence of the condition of the property. This should help with any disputes as to whether any depreciation of the property is fair wear and tear or whether it is acceptable for the landlord to make deductions due to repairs that need to be made.

See also the section in this guide on Deposits and Tenancy Deposit Schemes.

A **Model Inventory** produced by the Accommodation Office is available for use by students.
5. Your Responsibilities and Housing Rights

What is expected from you as a tenant?
- Give honest and truthful statements during the process of applying for a property
- Pay rent when it becomes due
- Respect and care for the property
- Pay the landlord for any damage (other than normal wear and tear) at the end of, or during, the tenancy
- Pay the landlord for cleaning and removing rubbish at the end of the tenancy if this is beyond what may be reasonably expected
- If there is anything wrong with the property, report it to the landlord immediately, ideally in writing, and keep a copy
- Do not use the property for anything other than your home (do not to run a business)
- Do not keep pets, unless agreed by your landlord or permitted by your tenancy agreement
- Do not do anything in or near your property that would annoy your landlord or neighbours
- Do not damage the property or cause a nuisance
- Remember that you are responsible for the conduct of your guests and visitors
- Do not leave the property unoccupied for more than 21 days without letting the landlord or the managing agent know
- Do not use your deposit to cover the payment of rent
- Follow the terms of your tenancy agreement and look after your home in a ‘tenant-like manner’ – i.e. take care of the property and do the little jobs that it is reasonable for you to do as a tenant e.g. ensure that drains are not blocked by waste food

What can you expect from your landlord?
- Your home must be safe for you to live in. The landlord must:
- Keep the structure and outside of the property (including drains, gutters and external pipes) in good repair
- Keep the installations in the property for the supply of water, gas and electricity and for sanitation (including basins, sinks, baths and sanitary conveniences) in good repair and working order
- Keep the installations in the property for heating and water heating water in good repair and working order
- Provide you with the full name and address of the landlord or the agent
- Provide you with a copy of the current Gas Safety Certificate
- Allow you to ‘peacefully’ enjoy your accommodation
- Provide you with at least 24 hours notice before visiting the property to carry out the repairs for which they are responsible or to inspect the condition of the property. Tenants are expected to co-operate with landlords regarding access in the event of emergencies
- Ensure that furniture and furnishings meet required standards for fire safety
6. Tenancy Agreements / Contracts

- Students should seek appropriate advice regarding tenancy agreements before they are signed. If your landlord will not allow you to take a copy of the contract away to be looked over/checked, you are advised not to sign it. The Accommodation Office will be pleased to look over tenancy agreements on behalf of students before they are signed.

- The tenancy agreement is a legally binding document which sets out the rights and responsibilities of both the landlord and the tenant(s). Once signed, the tenancy agreement provides certain rights which are protected in law and which cannot be overwritten by the contract: for example, the landlord will have a statutory duty to maintain the structure of the property in good repair, regardless of what the tenancy agreement may or may not indicate.

- The terms of the agreement must be in plain, intelligible language and not be unfair: for example, they must not include excessive charges for the late payment of rent.

- Tenancy agreements will be either ‘joint’ or ‘individual’. If you sign a joint tenancy, with all of the names of the tenants on one contract, you will be jointly and severally responsible for the payment of rent and for the care of the property. For example, if your housemate does not pay his or her rent, the landlord could demand it from the other tenants.

- The majority of private sector accommodation for students is let on fixed term assured shorthold tenancy agreements, normally for a 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, 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.

- With fixed term tenancy agreements tenants are responsible for the terms of their agreements until the end of the fixed term period. 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 wish to move out of their accommodation before the end of the fixed term period are therefore advised to discuss the situation in appropriate detail with their landlord before they move out of the accommodation.

- Students who 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 financial difficulty if they break a tenancy agreement and move into a second property as they will have accepted liability for the payment of rent at two properties.
7. **Deposits / Bonds**

When you pay a deposit, it is important to be aware what it is that you are paying. For example, is the deposit refundable? Is the deposit to cover any damage to the property or to cover rent arrears or unpaid utility bills? Landlords should therefore clearly state in the tenancy agreement exactly what the deposit covers.

**Tenancy Deposit Protection Schemes**

Until recently, students would sometimes complain that landlords were making unfair deductions from their deposits. However, from 6 April 2007, all deposits (for rent up to £25,000 per annum) taken by landlords and letting agents for assured shorthold tenancies in England and Wales, must now be protected by a government sponsored tenancy deposit protection scheme. The tenancy deposit protection schemes will facilitate the resolution of any disputes that arise in connection with such deposits.

**There are two types of tenancy deposit protection scheme:**

**Custodial Scheme** - Here a tenant pays the deposit to the landlord who in turn places it into a designated scheme account. If an agreement is reached about how the deposit should be divided, the scheme will return the deposit, divided in the way agreed by both parties. However, if there is a dispute, the scheme will hold the deposit until the dispute resolution service or courts decide what is fair. The interest accrued by deposits in the scheme will be used to pay for the running of the scheme and any surplus will be used to offer interest to the tenant, or to the landlord if the tenant is not entitled to it.

**Insurance Based Schemes** – With Insurance Based Schemes a tenant pays the deposit to the landlord who only transfers it into a designated scheme if there is a dispute at the end of the agreement. When the landlord and tenant reach agreement or a court decides how much each party is entitled to, the administrator will distribute the deposit accordingly. If a landlord fails to pay the deposit to the scheme then a scheme will have adequate insurance cover to compensate tenants if event they are owed monies.

**General Requirements**

Within 14 days of receiving your deposit your landlord must give you the relevant information regarding the scheme safeguarding your deposit. You should always check that the scheme has received your deposit.

For details on the Tenancy Deposit Scheme in England and Wales please visit: [http://www.thedisputeservice.co.uk/](http://www.thedisputeservice.co.uk/)

When you move out you should have your deposit returned within 10 days. If there are any disputes at the end of the tenancy the Tenancy Deposit Scheme offers a free and independent resolution service.

**What if my Landlord has not signed up to the scheme?**

You can apply to the County Court who may either require your landlord to repay your deposit or order your landlord to join the scheme.

For further information see: [www.direct.gov.uk/tenancydeposit](http://www.direct.gov.uk/tenancydeposit)
8. Utility Bills

Living in private accommodation will usually involve paying your own utility bills (unless your landlord offers rent which is inclusive of utility bills). These bills normally include: water, gas, electricity, telephone, internet and TV Licence.

Household bills can often become the cause of disputes, so make sure you understand where you stand legally regarding your liability for bills and how to avoid any unnecessary problems. Your tenancy agreement should state who is responsible for paying the bills and generally all tenants will be jointly and severally liable for bills. If bills are not paid, the utility company will only pursue those tenants named on the bill for the payments. It is therefore advisable to name all tenants on the utility bills to avoid any disputes.

Before moving in, it is important to take meter readings and to notify the utility companies of the date you move in. This will help to prevent you from being responsible for the bills of the previous tenants. It would also be a good idea to get the forwarding addresses or parental addresses for everyone you live with, so that if any bills do not get paid you will be able to contact your housemates. Some landlords will insist on seeing evidence that all utility bills have been paid before returning your deposit.

Finally, the utility bills that you have to pay will vary from property to property and this is something to consider carefully when viewing properties. Some landlords, for example, will include water rates in the rent. If in doubt, check your contract for further details.
Gas, Electrical and Fire Safety Advice

Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
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Accommodation for families and couples

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At the beginning of the university year, you will be preoccupied with new timetables and getting reacquainted with your friends and the students union. So, cleaning rotas, bills or crucially, fire safety, may not be top of your agenda. But as partying, smoking and drinking can be part of student life, you may be at a greater risk from fire.

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Before you move in, the landlord is legally obliged to produce the Gas Safety Certificate to show that all gas appliances have been inspected and tested within the last 12 months

Does the landlord have certification for the electrical installation?
Properties that are part of the Mandatory Licensing scheme operated by Ceredigion County Council are required to have a Periodic Inspection Report for the electrical installation to show that the electrical installation has been inspected within the last 5 years

Is there any fire detection equipment?
Are there smoke alarms, fire extinguishers and fire doors? Do they work properly?

Does each room in the property have a clear escape route?

Are there good locks on doors and windows?

Things to remember when you move in

Do remember to:

- Make sure that everybody in the property has a set of keys. Ensure that, if necessary, the landlord supplies keys for any window locks
- Ensure that the previous tenants have given all their keys back
- If the property has a burglar alarm, ask the landlord to change the code
- Never leave the main door(s) unlocked even if you are at home

Do remember not to:

- Let contractors or anyone else into the property without seeing their identification
- Leave the property unsecure. Make sure the house is locked, all windows are closed and that the property is secure whenever it is empty
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