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# **Private Rented Accommodation**



# **Landlord Handbook**

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## Introduction

Middlesex University and the Private Rented Accommodation (PRA) Office staff are available to assist students find suitable accommodation for the duration of their study period at the University via MiddlesexStudentPad.co.uk.

If in the past you have offered accommodation to our students we would like to express our thanks for your help. If you are considering renting to students for the first time, we hope you will find it a worthwhile experience.

This booklet aims to provide you with information and answer some of the questions you may have.

### **The system is simple.**

You register your accommodation with us and the details are kept on a database.

Your accommodation vacancies are then advertised to our students via our Middlesexstudentpad website [[www.middlesexstudentpad.co.uk](http://www.middlesexstudentpad.co.uk)]

Students then contact you directly to make a mutually convenient appointment to visit the property. This gives both the student and yourselves the opportunity to meet each other and discuss tenancy information.

Owners are advised to obtain details of identification from the student such as full name, year and course of study and home address. All students carry Middlesex University admission cards after enrolment which can be produced as proof of identity. Prior to formal enrolment all students will as an alternative proof of identity have a letter from the **University Admissions** office.

To enable us to provide an efficient service owners are asked to update MiddlesexStudentPad if there is any change in the accommodation being offered and when the accommodation is no longer available.

## About Middlesex University

Students come to Middlesex from all over Great Britain and from overseas. We currently have one main teaching campus at Hendon with **over 16,000** students enrolled on in excess of 100 courses at degree and postgraduate levels.

Middlesex also has international regional offices in several countries including Cyprus, Dubai, India, Malaysia, Hong Kong and the USA recruiting overseas students.

## The Role of the Private Rented Accommodation (PRA) Office

We will endeavour to put students and owners in touch with each other. Our system operates in the following way:

Property owners with available accommodation register with us via MiddlesexStudentPad and these details are then approved and displayed for students to view on the Middlesexstudentpad website. We try to inspect accommodation from time to time and reserve the right to refuse properties and rooms.

Students contact owners, make appointments to meet them, view the properties and discuss mutually agreeable tenancy terms. Students may view more than one property and so may not make a decision on the first viewing.

Middlesexstudentpad is available to our students all year round but we cannot however guarantee that your accommodation will be taken.

It must be emphasised that the PRA office does not make the actual letting agreement. All negotiations and agreements are strictly a private matter between the owner and the student(s). The University are unable to provide advice or mediation with regard to disputes with students and you should therefore seek independent legal advice before choosing to rent your property and if any difficulties arise during the term of the tenancy.

## How the Owner Can Assist

Owners are asked to either update their details online when the accommodation has been let and if a vacancy arises in the future. Your assistance is vital to enable us to provide to students up-to-date details of available accommodation, thus preventing unnecessary telephone calls to owners after the accommodation has been let. Once your property is registered we will contact you annually in April/May to remind you to update your availability for the new academic year [September – July].

## Types of Accommodation

Our students come from different backgrounds and have diverse personal circumstances, therefore their accommodation needs vary. The types of rented accommodation required are:

**Shared rented flats/houses** - rooms in self contained properties where each room is let individually, with a non resident owner.

**Whole rented flats/houses** - self contained properties for rent by a group of students, with a non resident owner.

**Lodgings** - where the property is shared with a resident owner.

## Shared Rented Flats/Houses

These are rooms in shared flats/houses, where the owner is not resident at the property and is the most popular type of accommodation for students.

**Heating:** Adequate heating is one of the most important features to be provided when letting a property. Ideally the property should be centrally heated, or alternatively an economic and safe form of heating should be provided.

**Bills:** In most cases, students take over the responsibility of paying the electricity and gas bills when they occupy the property. It is advisable for students to provide the utility company with their details. Sometimes the owner may share a common meter with student tenants and will make an inclusive fuel charge with the rent. If the property has a telephone and students wish to use it, they should be made responsible for paying the bill themselves.

As the accommodation owner, you will continue to be responsible for all payments of the mortgage and house insurance. It is essential to be fully insured against fire and ensure you have the correct landlord insurance. Students are responsible for insuring their own belongings.

**Length of stay:** Most students want to rent a house or flat for one academic year only. Thus rent is usually paid from mid September through to the following June - about 40 weeks a year. Many owners use the summer months to do repairs and renovations to prepare the property for renting to a new group of students.

**Council Tax:** Whilst the property is solely occupied by full-time students, it is exempt from Council Tax. Students can obtain an exemption certificate from their university accounts or Unihelp desk.

## Whole Rented Flats/Houses

Whole rented flats/houses, where the owner is not resident at the property, are popular for students who have already formed groups and wish to share a property together. The preferred house size would enable a group of three or four friends to share, but there are always many students interested in any self contained unit accommodating between two and five students. Students usually prefer not to share bedrooms. Although a communal room is desirable it is not always necessary, so long as the kitchen is a reasonable size. The same letting requirements apply as detailed under the heading 'shared rented flats/houses'.

## Lodgings

Self-catering lodgings where the owner lives on the premises are especially suited to the younger students who are living away from home for the first time.

In our experience most students prefer to cater for themselves, as student lifestyles and course timetables do not usually fit in with family meals. Self-catering arrangements usually means that students will require the use of the household kitchen at mutually agreeable times.

Most students require lodgings for seven days a week and some may occasionally go home at weekends. Students should be expected to pay for lodgings during term-time only and not in vacation periods. If the student is not occupying the room during the vacation period they should pack up their belongings, making the room available to the owner for the holiday period. However, if they are leaving their belongings and intend returning to the accommodation, a small retainer may be appropriate and should be agreed in advance with the student.

**Requirements:** Owners are asked to provide bedrooms with study facilities, i.e. use of a desk or table. The room should be large enough to allow space for a bed, table and chair and adequate storage space for clothes, books and other personal belongings.

Adequate heating, lighting and ventilation must be provided and should be included in the overall charge made to students. All bedding, including bed linen, should be provided by the owner, who is responsible for laundering it. Personal laundry is the student's own responsibility although some owners offer to do this for a small extra charge.

Keys should be provided to the student on the understanding that they will be responsible for always securely locking the doors behind them and that the keys will be returned to the owner during vacations and when the student leaves.

**House Rules:** At the beginning of a letting, owners should make clear to the student the terms of occupancy and confirm this in writing to the student. In addition, discuss any particular rules of the household, for example whether they are expected to live as part of the family, whether smoking is allowed in the house etc. If these matters are made clear from the start, it will help avoid misunderstandings later. It is reasonable for the owners to expect to be informed if the student intends to return late or intends to be out overnight.

The question of visitors is left to the student and the owner. If the students would like to entertain friends, it is expected that they should reach an agreement with the owner, and that the owner's reasonable wishes on matters concerning visiting and overnight guests should be respected by the student.

Similarly, it is left to the owner's discretion whether the student may use the house telephone. It is recommended that all outgoing calls are paid for at the time they are made.

## **Furnishings**

It is expected that the accommodation owner will provide all the usual furnishings of a house adequate for the number of students living in the property, with the important additions of a desk/table and upright chair, suitable for study purposes, for each student.

### **Furnishings should include:**

#### For each Student Bedroom

3ft bed (minimum size)  
Clean, firm mattress and cover  
Dressing table/chest of drawers  
Wardrobe or combination unit  
Desk or table with chair  
Waste bin  
Table lamp  
Easy chair (if not provided in common room)  
Book shelf

#### Bathroom

WC and washbasin  
Bath or shower  
Lavatory brush and holder  
Toilet roll holder  
Towel rail

#### Kitchen

Cooker  
Fridge freezer

Cupboards (if not fitted)  
Kettle  
Rubbish bin  
Dustpan and brush and broom  
Mop and bucket  
Vacuum cleaner and tools  
Washing up bowl and rack  
Fire blanket or fire extinguisher\* (see below)  
Table and chairs (space permitting)  
Basic supply of crockery, pots and pans

### Common Room

Sofa and easy chairs  
Table and chairs (if not provided in the kitchen)

### General

Doormat  
Curtains, or blinds  
Light bulbs and lampshades throughout

Suitable flooring in every room

Smoke detectors

\*A fire blanket and a dry powder fire extinguisher complying with British Standard Code of Practice should be provided and sited within the

## Inventory

It is in the interests of both owners and students to agree an inventory of contents of the property at the start of the tenancy to avoid disputes at the end of the tenancy. The inventory should list all contents and furnishings and their condition and a signed copy must be given to the students at the beginning of the tenancy.

## Rents

With the introduction of tuition fees in 1998, student finances have been stretched even further. Many now rely increasingly on student loans, bank overdrafts and parental contributions and are not eligible for Housing Benefit payments during term time or vacations unless they are single parents or registered as disabled. We urge you therefore to consider keeping any rent increases to a minimum, in order to keep your properties competitively priced within the student market.

**As a guide average rents per student per room are:**

<b>Shared flats/houses</b>	<b>£140 a week exclusive of bills</b>
<b>Whole flats/houses</b>	<b>£140 a week exclusive of bills</b>
<b>Lodgings</b>	<b>£100 a week inclusive of bills</b>

A business arrangement: The most important thing is to make sure that both the owner and the student/tenant know clearly and exactly how much rent is to be paid, when it is to be paid and what will be provided in return. After all, it is a business arrangement and neither owner nor student should assume that anything is included or excluded in the arrangement without mentioning it right from the start.

## Tenancy Agreements

A tenancy agreement is a legally binding contract between a landlord and a tenant which lays down the responsibilities of both parties. It is strongly advisable to have a written contract as opposed to an oral agreement.

The most common tenancy agreement for students (**with a non-resident owner**) is an "Assured Shorthold Tenancy". This ensures that the Landlord has the absolute right of re-possession at the end of the tenancy (two month's notice must still be served). Typically the agreement should show the landlord's name and address, the address of the property being rented, the amount of rent that is due and whether that is paid weekly or monthly and what day of the week or month it is due, when the tenancy will commence and when the tenancy will end.

Although **resident owners** cannot use Assured Shorthold Tenancy agreements, they can instead use a written contract or a Licence to set out the terms upon which they are allowing the student to share their home. Typically, the agreement should state the amount of rent, how often it is to be paid, how much notice is required by either party, what services are to be provided by the owner e.g. laundry, what the student and owner are expected to pay for e.g. utility bills.

Tenancy agreements, rent books etc can be obtained from:  
Oyez Forms Publishing Tel: 0845 217 7565; [www.oyezformslink.co.uk](http://www.oyezformslink.co.uk)  
Law Pack Publishing Ltd Tel: 0207 394 4040; [www.lawpack.co.uk](http://www.lawpack.co.uk)  
Staples: visit [www.staples.co.uk](http://www.staples.co.uk) for store locations.

A signed copy of any tenancy agreement entered into by both the property owner and tenant(s) must be given to the student(s).

## **Receipts**

Signed receipts should be given whenever any money is paid. Each receipt should show what has been paid for, the amount of money received, from whom and what the money has been paid for i.e. deposit or rent (including dates and the year the rent relates to).

## **Damages Deposits**

Any money to be used as a damage deposit should be paid at the start of the tenancy when keys are collected. At the conclusion of a tenancy, deposits should be refunded following a satisfactory inspection of the property. Money should not be used against wear and tear, but only to recover losses caused by wilful damage/negligence. Deposits taken in respect of assured shorthold tenancies must be protected by the tenancy deposit scheme (further information is provided on pages 8). Deductions made against deposits should be supported by copy receipts for work carried out. If any repairs are to be done or additional furniture provided prior to students moving into a property, the details should be written down, along with the completion date and a copy given to the students.

Students often complain about delays in the return of any deposits and it is recommended that they should be returned within 14 days. Any deductions made for damages or missing items should be detailed and itemised and advised to the former residents in writing as quickly as possible, after the residents have left the property.

## **Behaviour of Tenants**

Landlords should advise tenants of the need to maintain satisfactory relationships with their neighbours by avoiding excessive noise, litter or obstructive car parking outside the property. Neighbours also appreciate the opportunity to communicate any problems that may arise to the owner of the property directly.

We regret that Middlesex University and the PRA office cannot accept responsibility or liability for the actions or behaviour of students or for their rental or contractual commitments.

## Gas Safety

Every year at least 30 people die of carbon monoxide poisoning caused by gas appliances which have not been properly installed or serviced. The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994, place duties on gas consumers, installers, suppliers and landlords. All gas appliances must be both fitted professionally and regularly serviced by a Gas Safe registered engineer. By law all landlords are responsible for making sure that appliances are maintained in good order and checked for safety at least every 12 months. Landlords are legally obliged to keep a record of the safety check. New tenants should be given individual copies of these certificates at the time the contract is signed and existing tenants should be provided with copies of gas safety certificates within 28 days of the check being carried out. Alternatively the record must be permanently displayed on the premises.

## Electrical Safety

Health and Safety regulations now place landlords under an obligation to ensure that the electrical installation (wiring, sockets etc.) and any electrical appliances supplied are safe.

You should ensure that a suitable test of electrical safety is carried out by a member of the NICEIC (National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation) and produces a certificate confirming safety of the electrical installation. In addition, a visual inspection of all socket outlets, switches, lamp holders, distribution boards and safety devices prior to commencement of each academic year is needed and if any defects are discovered, they must be remedied.

## Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety)

The rules and regulations concerning fire safety in rented accommodation have tightened in recent years in order to protect the safety of tenants. As a result the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended in 1989 and 1993) require that all upholstered or foam-filled furniture (including sofas, armchairs, cushions, mattresses and pillows) supplied by landlords in any rented accommodation from 1 January 1997 must meet the fire resistance requirements of the Regulations and must be labelled as such.

Most new furniture manufactured and sold since 1988 must carry two labels: a display label and a permanent label. The exemptions, which will usually carry only a permanent label are: mattresses, bed bases, pillows, scatter cushions, seat pads, and loose covers for upholstered furniture.

**Display labels** - are in the form of a swing ticket. The appropriate display label must be attached to the furniture in a prominent position so that it is clearly visible and the wording on both sides can be read easily.

**Permanent labels** - This label gives more detailed information about the tests which the furniture has passed.

It warns you that 'CARELESSNESS CAUSES FIRE' and there should be a batch number stated. Permanent labels are usually found on the underside of the furniture or underneath any removable seating cushions (for example a chair or sofa).

An owner/agent may ask students to remove furniture they bring from home if it does not meet the standards.

## Tenancy Deposit Protection (for Assured Shorthold Tenancies only)

Any deposits taken from tenants must be protected with one of the three government approved deposit protection companies. This must be done within 30 days of the deposit money being taken and a notice giving all the prescribed information should (be) provided to the tenant within the 30 day deadline. If this is not done, tenants are entitled to go to court and ask for the return of the deposit (or for an order that it be protected by the custodial scheme) and for a payment to them of a 'fine' of three times the deposit money.

At the end of tenancy the condition and contents of the property should be checked against the agreement made at the start of the tenancy. The landlord then agrees with the tenant how much of the deposit will be returned to them and the amount should be returned within 10 days. If no agreement can be reached about how much of the deposit should be returned, the scheme which is protecting the deposit will offer a free service to resolve the dispute.

The three authorised companies are:

### **The Deposit Protection Service (The DPS)**

The DPS is the only custodial deposit protection scheme, is free to use and open to all Landlords. The service is funded entirely from the interest earned from deposits held. Further information is available at: [www.depositprotection.com](http://www.depositprotection.com) or Tel: 0870 707 1 707

### **Tenancy Deposit Solutions Ltd (TDSL)**

TDSL is a partnership between the National Landlords Association and Hamilton Fraser Insurance. This insurance-based tenancy deposit protection scheme enables landlords, either directly or through agents, to hold deposits. Further information is available at: [www.mydeposits.co.uk](http://www.mydeposits.co.uk) or Tel: 0871 703 0552

### **The Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS)**

TDS is an insurance-backed deposit protection and dispute resolution scheme run by The Dispute Service that builds on a scheme established in 2003 to provide dispute resolution and complaints handling for the lettings industry. The new scheme enables letting agents and landlords to hold deposits. Further information is available at: [www.thedisputeservice.co.uk](http://www.thedisputeservice.co.uk) or Tel: 0845 226 7837.

## Equal Opportunities

Middlesex University is committed to the provision of equality of opportunity for all and is formulating and implementing policies and practices to this end.

In the provision of Equal Opportunities, the University realises and accepts its responsibilities under the law. The policy also aims to reach beyond legislative boundaries and provide equality of opportunity regardless of age, disability, ethnic origin, family responsibility, marital status, political belief, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or social class.

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