

The University of Essex Accreditation Scheme

Private landlords play an important role in providing accommodation for students.

Although it is recognised that many landlords are doing a good job, the quality of rented housing can vary widely – Whilst some properties offer excellent accommodation which is safe and well managed, some properties are neglected and even dangerous. This can make it very difficult for students and their parents to know what they will be getting when they take on a shared house.

The Student Accommodation Accreditation Scheme provides a way of giving recognition to landlords who have a responsible approach to renting, and a means of identifying those student houses which meet these Accreditation standards.

The Accreditation Scheme has been developed by Colchester Borough Council and the University of Essex in consultation with the Colchester Landlords Association for Students and Staff (CLASS).

The nature, extent and standards of the Accreditation Scheme have been discussed at length during a series of meetings and we are particularly grateful to the representatives of the landlords association for their important contribution to the development of this voluntary scheme.

LIMITATIONS OF THE SCHEME

Officers of the Council and the University of Essex will use their best endeavours to ensure that the property is suitable and that all parties abide by the terms and conditions of the Scheme.

It is not in the best interests of the scheme for tenants or landlords to do anything which lowers the standards of accommodation. However, clearly circumstances can change at any time after the application has been received or the inspection has been carried out. For this reason, the organisations responsible for inspections are unable to accept any liability for the state of the premises or the actions of the tenants, owner or manager of the property.

Please Note

Nothing in the scheme alters the rights and responsibilities of the landlord or tenant as set out in landlord and tenant law. Colchester Borough Council and the University of Essex do not accept liability for any loss a landlord may incur as a result of a decision to refuse or revoke the accreditation of a property, and they do not absolve the owners, landlords or tenants from exercising due diligence in ensuring that their property is safe and up to the standards required.

APPLICATIONS AND INSPECTIONS

For properties already accredited: Landlords should book an appointment with the local authority to have an HHSRS inspection. Once an appointment is made the property may be advertised through the University.

For new properties that are not currently accredited: Landlords should make an application for accreditation through the University. Once registered, application for an HHSRS inspection may be made with the local authority.

Licensed HMOs will not normally require an HHSRS inspection but they will need to be accredited and landlords should apply for accreditation with the University.

INTRODUCTION

Accredited accommodation is the preferred option for all shared property let to students through the University of Essex. The scheme does not apply to bed and breakfast accommodation or rooms shared with a resident landlord.

The scheme will normally apply to accommodation that is occupied both on a shared or single occupancy basis.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHEME

The terms and conditions of the Scheme must be met before a property can be included in the Scheme.

The main objectives of the Accreditation Scheme are:-

1. To encourage good practice and the provision of good quality private rented accommodation for students.
2. To improve liaison (and encourage co-operation) between landlords, the Council and the University.
3. To provide landlords with a clearly-defined set of standards to which to aspire
4. To give official recognition to those landlords whose properties achieve the agreed standards
5. To provide students (and their parents/guardians) with confidence that the properties have complied with these (Accreditation) standards at the time of accreditation.
6. To promote the fact that tenants have responsibilities (as well as rights) and that landlords have rights and not just responsibilities.

ACCREDITATION

The property must be inspected by a representative of the University of Essex and/or Colchester Borough Council before it can be considered for inclusion on the Accreditation Scheme. (Inspections will only be carried out upon receipt of a valid application, including the appropriate fee).

Accreditation will be conditional upon the terms of the Scheme being satisfied and the landlord providing all the necessary documentation, including that relating to gas and electrical safety.

Accreditation will be valid for a period of up to twelve months and will only be renewed if it is established that the property and landlord continue to comply with the terms and conditions of the Scheme.

DISQUALIFICATION

The University of Essex will endeavour to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that participating landlords are fit and proper persons.

The following circumstances are likely to lead to a landlord being refused accreditation (or to the accreditation of a property being revoked) if they come to light.

1. The landlord (or their agent, if they have one) has been convicted, during the last ten years, of an offence of harassment or unlawful eviction, mortgage fraud, housing benefit fraud, or a breach of the conditions attached to a housing grant
2. The landlord (or their agent, if they have one) has failed to comply with the requirements of any statutory notice served by the Council and this has resulted, during the last five years, in either their prosecution or works being carried out in default.
3. The landlord (or their agent, if they have one) has used the Accreditation Certificate or their involvement in the Scheme, during the last five years, in a manner which is either fraudulent or intended to deceive.
4. The landlord (or their agent, if they have one) has been convicted of a criminal offence which could be construed as being relevant to the letting of property to young people and which has not been 'spent' within the meaning of the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.
5. Failure to maintain the standards required under the terms of the scheme

APPEALS MECHANISM

In the event of a landlord being dissatisfied with the decision reached on their application (either because they have been disqualified or it has been decided that the terms and conditions of the Accreditation Scheme have not been satisfied), they can apply to the nominated council representative for a review of the decision.

If the original decision is upheld, the landlord has the right of appeal to an Appeals Panel comprising the Council's representative (different from the reviewer), together with two private landlords and a representative of the University's Accommodation Office.

ACCREDITATION CERTIFICATE

The Certificate must be displayed in a conspicuous position within the premises and contain the following information.

1. The full postal address of the property
2. The name and telephone number of the landlord/agent
3. The date the Certificate was issued
4. The maximum number of lettings and occupants
5. The date the property was last inspected
6. The expiry date on the Gas Safety Certificate (Tenants will be encouraged to ask for sight of the most recent Certificate)
7. Details of any conditions attached to registration (or any issues, such as fire safety/internal layout, which students should be made aware of)
8. The expiry date for accreditation
9. The telephone number of the Council's Private Sector Housing Team and the University of Essex's Accommodation Office (for queries and complaints)

PLANNING PERMISSION AND BUILDING REGULATIONS APPROVAL

Landlords must consult the Council's planning department about all matters requiring planning consent.

Inclusion of a property within the Accreditation Scheme does not imply, in any way, that planning consent has been, or will be, granted for the use of the property for any particular purpose.

Where structural alteration is required to the property, it is the owner's responsibility to consult with the Council's Building Control team at the Town Hall.

FIRE RISK ASSESSMENT

Landlords must carry out a suitable and sufficient Fire Risk Assessment. The University reserve the right to audit or inspect the premises and relevant documentation at any time.

PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE

Landlords are required to ensure that the property has a valid public liability insurance certificate to a value of at least £1 million at the time of accreditation and must make this document available to any prospective tenant.

ENERGY PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

Landlords must ensure that their property has an up to date EPC and this must be made available for prospective tenants to view.

TENANCY DEPOSIT PROTECTION

Landlords must ensure that their tenant's deposits are protected in a relevant Government authorised scheme run by either The TDS (The Tenancy Deposit Scheme), The DPS (The Deposit Protection Scheme or the TDSL (Tenancy Deposit Solutions Ltd)

STANDARD OF ACCOMMODATION

1. State of Repair

The property must be suitable for occupation, free from hazards and maintained in a good state of repair at all times

2. Cleanliness

At the beginning of the tenancy:

- The property must be reasonably clean, free from insect infestations (such as fleas, bed bugs or cockroaches), and free from rats or mice
- The carpets must be in a reasonable condition and properly fixed
- The carpets in the hall and on the stairs and landing must be secure and not contain any holes
- The walls and ceilings must be in a state of reasonable decorative order
- All blankets and linen supplied by the landlord must have been laundered.

3. Gas Safety

All gas appliances (including cookers) must be maintained in a safe condition and serviced at least once every 12 months by a CORGI registered contractor in accordance with Gas Safety Regulations.

The annual Gas Safety Certificate must be available for inspection by tenants, and by representatives of the Council and the University of Essex.

The Gas Safety Certificate must be valid at the time of accreditation. **A new certificate must be produced annually.**

4. Electrical Safety

Each study/bedroom shall be provided with a minimum of two double 13 amp power sockets (or equivalent), suitably sited to permit the safe use of appliances.

Students are responsible for ensuring the safety of all electrical items they bring onto the premises.

The electrical installation must have been inspected and tested by a qualified electrician, using the format of a periodic inspection report used by the ECA or NICEIC within the **five** years immediately prior to the application for accreditation.

Any defects which are highlighted as requiring "urgent attention" must be remedied (and suitable certification provided to this effect) before the Periodic Inspection Report can be accepted as satisfactory.

In addition to the above requirements, the landlord will be required to complete a visual self-certification of the electrical safety on an annual basis, using an agreed format.

5. Fire Safety

Landlords can find detailed advice in the guidance for sleeping accommodation under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order. Suitable and sufficient measures must be defined in the Fire Risk Assessment. The following information is for basic guidance only:

Polystyrene ceiling tiles and surface-applied polystyrene insulation on walls will greatly assist the spread of fire, so must not be present in the property.

Landlords must ensure that they complete a regular maintenance, testing and checking schedule of the fire alarm system and provide induction information for tenants (emergency action), including sounding an alarm for those who may not recognise it.

Landlords should contact the Universities Fire Officer if a tenant requires a Personal Emergency Plan (PEP) i.e. due to impairment of sight or hearing or physical restrictions that may impede their escape in the event of an emergency.

a) Smoke Detectors

As a minimum, in all properties comprising one or two storeys, mains operated, interlinked smoke detectors (to meet BS5446) must be fitted in the ground floor hall/passage and on the first floor landing. An interlinked mains wired heat detector must be fitted in the kitchen to meet BS5446.

Additional measures may be required, particularly in more complex properties, but this will be determined by the Fire Risk Assessment and HHSRS inspection undertaken by the local authority.

b) Escape Routes

Escape routes must be kept clear of obstructions and combustible materials at all times and should be adequately lit at all times.

All internal and external doors which are used as a means of escape from fire must be fully operational from the inside with a single device. The door between the kitchen and route of escape must be a fire door providing half hour protection.

The exit from a room should not normally be through any other room such as a living room, kitchen or bedroom. Where this is unavoidable, appropriate fire safety measures (specified by the Council's Private Sector Housing Team in consultation with Essex Fire and Rescue Service) must be introduced to reduce the risk of injury from fire.

In many instances, an additional mains operated, interlinked smoke detector to BS5446 will be sufficient. However, in less common circumstances (where the layout of the house presents higher risks), measures such as escape windows to upstairs rooms and/or provision of an upstairs telephone point will be required.

c) Fire doors

All single and 2 storey properties must have a self closing kitchen door which is 30/30 standard (half hour)

In all properties comprising 3 storeys or more, all living room doors and kitchen doors which lead directly onto the escape route must be fire doors. These must be 30/30 standard (half hour) with intumescent strips and smoke seals fitted on to the door or frame.

Please note some properties may require further fire doors depending on the type of HMO they are.

d) Fire blankets

All kitchens must contain a British Standard fire blanket (domestic size), fixed on a route out of the kitchen, not directly above the hob or cooker. A fire blanket must also be sited on each landing, fixed to the wall.

e) Recommended Contractual Terms:

The University recommends that landlords incorporate in their contract the following prohibitions:

- nothing to be left in corridors

- no use of candles, tea lights, aromatic oil heaters, incense sticks or any other device which has a naked flame, other than smokers' materials.
- no cooking equipment and kettles/rice cookers except in kitchens
- no heaters and electric blankets
- no smoking in bed

6. Home Security

Suitable locks must be provided for all windows of ground floor rooms and those windows of upper floor rooms which can be accessed externally from a flat roof.

7. Room sizes

The minimum room sizes normally accepted under the Accreditation Scheme areas follows:

- Single Bedrooms - 6.5m² / 70ft²
- Double Bedrooms – 10.2m² / 110ft²

Exceptions may be made where there are mitigating factors, such as access to cupboards/storage facilities outside the bedroom.

Each house must contain either a living room or a dining room/ kitchen diner of a suitable size for the residents. Ideally, there will be enough room for all the residents to sit down simultaneously.

8. Ventilation

All habitable rooms must be ventilated directly to the external air by an openable window of a reasonable size. As a guideline, we would expect the openable area to be equivalent to not less than one-twentieth of the floor area of the room..

Kitchens, bathrooms and w.c. compartments must be provided with adequate natural or mechanical ventilation. If mechanical ventilation is necessary it must comply with Building Regulations.

9. Natural Lighting

All habitable rooms must be provided with an area of clear glazing in an external wall, situated in either a window and/or a door. As a guideline, we would expect the total area of glazing to be equivalent to not less than one-tenth of the floor area of the room.

All glazing to bathrooms and/or w.c. compartments must either be obscure or be capable of being made obscure (by providing venetian blinds, for example).

10. Artificial Lighting

All habitable rooms, kitchens, bathrooms, w.c. compartments, staircases, landings and passages shall be adequately lit by electricity.

Although working lamps/bulbs must be supplied at the beginning of every tenancy, the landlord will not be responsible for providing replacement lamps/bulbs during tenancy.

There must be sufficient switches, fitted at suitable locations, to operate the lighting. All Staircases must have a switch at the top and bottom of each flight.

11. Washing Facilities

For properties occupied by up to five residents, at least one bath (or shower) and at least one wash hand basin must be provided, together with an adequate supply of hot and cold running water properly connected to a suitable drainage system.

12. Toilet Facilities

For properties occupied by up to five residents, at least one internal w.c must be provided. If there are 6-10 residents, two w.c's must be provided.

For properties occupied by five or more residents, the w.c. must be in a compartment which is separate from the bath/shower and should contain a wash hand basin with an adequate supply of hot and cold running water.

13. Kitchen Facilities

The kitchen must have the following:

- Adequate facilities for food storage for each resident. (Normally, there should be the equivalent of a single unit cupboard for each resident).
- A fixed worktop with impervious surface and of sufficient size for the number of residents, part of which must be adjacent to the cooker.
- A sink and drainer facilities with sufficient supply of hot and cold water (cold water must be wholesome and direct from mains).
- A minimum of three double power points suitably sited to permit the safe use of appliances.
- A British Standard fire blanket (domestic size).
- A hob with three or four rings/hotplates, together with a grill and oven
- A fridge (with freezer compartment) of an adequate size for the number of residents.(Where there are more than 4 residents, two fridges or a fridge and a freezer must be provided)
- A covered bin for storage of kitchen waste.
- A washing machine

14. Space Heating

Where central heating is not provided, all habitable rooms must have a fixed economic heating appliance which is capable of maintaining the room temperature at 21°C when the outside temperature is minus 1°C.

Bottled gas heaters or stoves and free- standing paraffin heaters must not be used.

Under no circumstances must any bedroom contain a conventionally flued gas fire or appliance.

15. Refuse Storage

Arrangements must be made for the satisfactory storage and disposal of refuse sacks in covered bins/receptacles.

16. Bicycle Storage

No Bicycles are to be kept in the halls or corridors of the property. If requested by the tenants (and unless this is totally impractical), adequate safe storage should be provided for securing bicycles.

17. Furniture and Furnishings

All beds, sofas, upholstered chairs and other relevant furniture must satisfy the requirements of the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988.

Further information on these Regulations can be obtained from Trading Standards Beehive Lane, Chelmsford, CM2 9SY. (Tel: 01245 341888).

a) Bedrooms

The following items must be provided in the bedroom of each student:

- An adult size single bed as a minimum, complete with mattress.
- Adequate hanging/storage space for clothes.
- An adequate study desk or table, and chair.
- Adequate storage for books. (As a guideline, any shelving should be at least 6ft in total length).
- A waste paper bin.

b) Other Rooms

The following items must be provided:

- A vacuum cleaner
- An ironing board
- Floor cleaning equipment appropriate to the type of kitchen floor.

c) Additional Items

Although accreditation is not conditional on the provision of these items, landlords are encouraged to provide a kettle, iron and set of saucepans.

18. Garden Equipment

If the tenants are expected to tend to the garden, adequate equipment and instructions must be provided. If an electric lawnmower is provided, a

30 ma RCD trip must be fitted permanently either to the appliance or to the circuit used for outside electrical appliances.

19. Notices

The following Notices must be displayed in a prominent position in the dwelling:

- A Notice describing the fire precautions, evacuation procedures, and the location of the rising main and gas point.
- The Certificate of Accreditation

20. Application Fees

To help meet the cost of assessing applications for accreditation, the University of Essex will charge a non-refundable application fee with reduced fees for licensed HMO properties.

The application fee will be charged as an addition to the normal registration fee and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

21. Tenancy Matters

The landlord must provide the tenants with a written tenancy agreement which sets out the conditions of the tenancy and the respective responsibilities of the landlord and tenants. (Both parties must be given identical copies of the agreement).

The landlord must provide the tenants with either a rent book or another form of receipt, recording all rent paid to the landlord or the landlord's agent.

It is usual for a landlord to ask for a deposit to cover loss and damage. This must not normally exceed the equivalent of more than two months' rent. All deposits must be protected by a Government approved scheme.

Unless otherwise agreed and except in an emergency (such as electricity, gas or water supply failure), the landlord or their contractor must normally give the tenants at least 48 hours written notice of their intention to gain access to the property.

Unless otherwise agreed, 24 hours' notice will be required where access is required for the purpose of allowing prospective tenants to view the property.

Unless otherwise agreed (and except in an emergency), access to the property should only take place between 8.00 am and 8.00 pm, Monday-Saturday and between 10.00 am and 6 pm on Sundays and Public Holidays.

The landlord must follow the correct legal process of eviction.

Amended January 2009