
Staff Accommodation

Finding Private Rented Accommodation

This fact sheet is designed to provide a resource to staff looking for rented accommodation and, for International staff in particular, to give an overview of how private rental contracts work in the UK. The Accommodation Office can offer more detailed advice and help with any housing problems.

Avoiding fraud

Unfortunately, fraud/scams in rented housing is becoming increasingly common in the UK. You can help protect yourself from losing money by:

- Not sending money to anyone advertising rental properties online until you are certain the advertiser is genuine.
- Using an agent that is registered with a professional body [ARLA](#), [BALMA](#), [UKALA](#), [NALS](#) or [NAEA](#).
- If you need to secure accommodation in the UK from overseas, get a friend, contact or relative to check the property exists and is available.
- Not paying any money until you or a reliable contact has visited the property with an agent or the landlord.
- Asking for copies of tenancy agreements and any safety certificates such as Gas, Electricity or HMO Licence.
- **Never** transferring money unless you are **100%** sure that the situation is authentic. If you are in any doubt, contact us for advice immediately.

For more information, please read our Renting Safely factsheet, available at:
www.bristol.ac.uk/accommodation/media/docs/factsheets/renting-safely.pdf

Looking for accommodation from overseas

We would strongly advise you not to arrange long-term private rented accommodation from overseas where possible. It is best to reserve a room in a local guesthouse while you look for suitable accommodation.

We also advise not to bring your family until you have secured accommodation. The University cannot provide temporary accommodation. A list of guesthouses is available at:

www.bristol.ac.uk/university/visit/stay.html

Right to Rent

The UK Government has introduced new law that requires all private landlords in England to check that prospective tenants have the right to live in the UK. This applies to everyone renting private sector accommodation. Please read our factsheet for more details:

www.bristol.ac.uk/accommodation/media/docs/factsheets/right-to-rent-staff.pdf

Areas to consider

You can get more information on popular local areas of Bristol to live in on our website at: www.bristol.ac.uk/accommodation/privately-rented/finding-privately-rented-accommodation/areas/. We would suggest that you consider living in areas further from the University as you may find more choice, better value for money, more of a community feel and better access to schools.

Where to look

Bristol SU Lettings

A lettings agency owned and run by the University of Bristol Students' Union. Offers a range of accommodation, from rooms with resident landlords, rooms in shared houses to self-contained properties on short and long term lets:
www.bristolsulettings.co.uk

University of Bristol Bulletin Board

Staff and students looking for flat sharers will advertise here, or you can post an advertisement yourself for flat sharers:

www.bristol.ac.uk/accommodation/privately-rented/finding-privately-rented-accommodation/bulletin-board.html

If you are not yet a member of staff, email us at accom-office@bris.ac.uk and we will send you a temporary username and password to access the Bulletin Board.

Letting Agencies

A list of agencies serving the University area and beyond can be found on the [Rightmove website](#). Many agencies will advertise their properties through:

- [Zoopla](#)
- [Rightmove](#)
- [Primelocation](#)
- [OnTheMarket.com](#)

You may also find it helpful to contact agencies individually. Most agencies will charge a fee of at least 35% of a month's rent plus VAT if you rent a property through them. Check that the agency is a member of one of the 3 redress schemes.

Other accommodation websites

Be particularly aware of scams when using these sites. If you are in any doubt at all about a property contact us for advice BEFORE sending any money:

www.bristol.gumtree.com
www.letwithease.com
www.upmystreet.com
www.propertyads.co.uk/rent/bristol
www.kangaroom.co.uk
www.spareroom.com
www.easyroommate.com
www.trade-it.co.uk
www.onthemarket.com/to-rent/property/bristol/

Once you have found a property

Contract/Tenancy Agreement

Before signing the contract, you must read it and ensure to understand yours and the landlord's responsibilities. You can get it checked by the Accommodation Office. Email it or drop in. We can also answer any queries you may have.

Tenancies in the UK are usually Assured Shorthold tenancies for a fixed term of 6 or 12 months. The tenant has "security of tenure" which means the

landlord cannot increase the rent during the term of the tenancy and he cannot end the tenancy during the fixed term except in very limited circumstances:

- Not paying the rent or frequently paying it late
- Causing damage to the property or its contents
- Creating a nuisance or using the property for criminal activities
- Breaking another term of the agreement
- The landlord defaults on his mortgage, but only if there is a mortgage clause in contract.

The landlord must also follow a specific legal process. At the same time, you cannot end the tenancy early unless:

- The landlord agrees to release you from the contract
- There is a break clause allowing you to give notice to end the tenancy before the end of the fixed term
- You find a suitable replacement tenant after having gained permission from the landlord (but it is best to get advice about this first)
- The property is declared uninhabitable by Environmental Health

If you sign the contract with another person, including your partner, you will each be jointly and individually responsible for the whole of the rent and/or damage to the property. This means, for example, that if one of you left the property and stopped paying rent, your landlord could choose to pursue you or any of the remaining tenants for the shortfall in rent.

Costs

Holding fees

Landlords/agents often request a non-returnable holding fee which can range from £100 to 1 month's rent. Do not pay this unless you are sure you want the property as you will lose it if you pull out. You would normally get this back when you sign the tenancy agreement.

Credit checks and providing guarantors

You may be asked to undergo a credit check, which will involve contacting your employer. Or you may also be asked to provide the name and address of someone in the UK who will promise to pay your rent or for any damage if you are not able to. This person is known as a guarantor.

If you don't have a guarantor then you may be asked for the full years rent upfront. Alternatively, you can apply to Housinghand.co.uk to act as a UK guarantor. They charge a total of 1 months rent for this service but you get some of this back at the end of the tenancy if there have been no problems. Not all landlords will accept this so you will need to check.

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/accommodation/privately-rented/finding-privately-rented-accommodation/guarantors/>

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Deposit

You will need to pay a damage deposit of up to two months' rent. This money must be returned to you at the end of the tenancy, minus any fair charges for damage, rent arrears or landlords costs, for example cleaning or redecorating.

The landlord must protect your deposit for the duration of your tenancy by using one of three government-approved schemes and s/he must tell you which one s/he is using within 30 days from taking your money.

Bills

On top of your rent you will have to pay:

- Council Tax - Your landlord or agent will be able to tell you how much this is for your property, but you should expect to pay upwards of £1000 per year. If you have come to the UK with a spouse who is exempt from paying then you may be entitled to a 25% discount
- Utilities – water, gas and electricity. Many people are shocked by how high our utility bills are in the UK, expect to pay at least £2,500 to cover these bills
- TV & internet rental and TV License- currently everyone who watches live TV in the UK must have a TV licence but from Autumn 2016 you will also need a license to watch catch up TV etc on any device.
- Insurance – Landlords will only insure the building and their belongings, you will be expected to insure your own belongings.

Tenants' rights

UK law gives tenants certain rights which cannot be changed by anything written in the contract. The most important are:

1. Right to Repair and for the property to be of a habitable standard – as long as you report any problems the landlord is responsible for repairs to:
 - The structure and exterior of the building, such as the walls, roof, external doors and windows
 - Sinks, baths, toilets and other sanitary fittings, including pipes and drains
 - Fixtures for heating and hot water
 - All gas appliances, pipes, flues and ventilation
 - Electrical wiring

Note that if you fail to report a repair you may become responsible for any damage that results.

2. Right to quiet enjoyment – landlords, agents or contractors should not enter your property without reasonable notice, usually 24 hours. Tenants should be free from interruption or interference from landlords, for example, where the landlord deliberately and persistently attempts to drive a tenant out by intimidation or by cutting off the supply of utilities to the premises.
3. Right to a fair contract that is easy to understand – contracts should be written in plain English and not contain any clauses that, for example, mean that a tenant has to pay extra money unfairly.

Tenants' responsibilities

Tenants have a number of responsibilities that they are required to meet as part of their contract. The most important of these are:

- To pay the rent, utility bills and council tax bills when due
- To maintain the property in the same condition as it was in when they moved in except for fair wear and tear
- To inform the landlord of any disrepair promptly
- To protect the property from damage and this includes protecting it in cold weather by leaving the heating on low while you are away

- To pay the bills associated with the property such as gas, electricity, water and council tax in full and on time
- Not to sublet or to allow other people to live in the property without the landlord's permission
- Not to cause a nuisance to your neighbours by e.g. excessive noise or failing to deal with your rubbish and recycling properly.

At the end of the tenancy

Your landlord should give at least 2 months' written notice if he wants you to move out. The notice should usually end on the last date of a rent period and state that it is a 'Section 21' notice. The tenant will have to give one months' notice ending on the last day of a rent period.

The University of Bristol Accommodation Office runs a housing advice service for all staff and students, if you have any problems with your private rented accommodation please contact us.

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✉ accom-office@bris.ac.uk

Office opening times: Mon 10-4, Tues 1-4, Wed 10-4, Thur 10-4, Fri 10-4



The contents of this fact sheet are for information only. You should consult the Accommodation Office or an advice centre such as the CAB before taking any action.

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