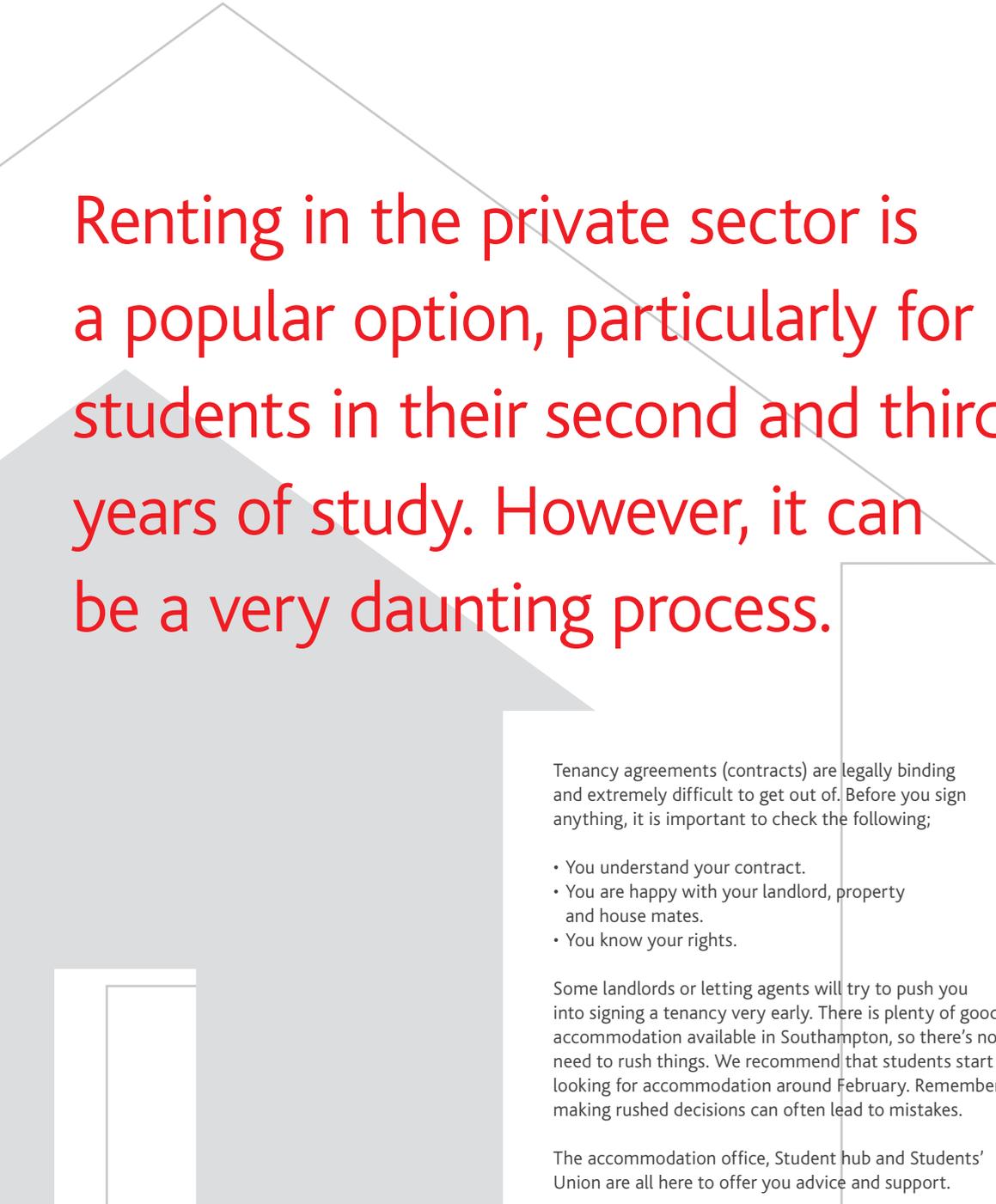


Guide to

PRIV**ATE**
SECTOR
HOUSING





Renting in the private sector is a popular option, particularly for students in their second and third years of study. However, it can be a very daunting process.

Tenancy agreements (contracts) are legally binding and extremely difficult to get out of. Before you sign anything, it is important to check the following;

- You understand your contract.
- You are happy with your landlord, property and house mates.
- You know your rights.

Some landlords or letting agents will try to push you into signing a tenancy very early. There is plenty of good accommodation available in Southampton, so there's no need to rush things. We recommend that students start looking for accommodation around February. Remember, making rushed decisions can often lead to mistakes.

The accommodation office, Student hub and Students' Union are all here to offer you advice and support.

SASSH

The Southampton Accreditation Scheme for Student Housing (SASSH) was set up to help protect students renting private accommodation. The scheme is run by Southampton Solent University in partnership with The University of Southampton and Southampton City Council.

The scheme allows landlords to advertise their properties on a central website (www.sassh.co.uk). Students can use the site to search for accommodation, advertise vacant rooms and find housemates.

Letting agencies

Agencies often charge a fee for finding you accommodation. However, it is illegal for an agency to charge fees if they are unable to do so. There can also be hidden costs such as charges for tenancy agreements. When making any payments, always ask for a receipt.

If you chose to use an agency, find out if they are a member of any professional body such as ARLA (www.arla.co.uk). You can then contact this organization if things go wrong.

What should I look out for?

- Try to get there a few minutes early so you can have a look around the outside of the property.
- If possible do not do a viewing at night, as this can disguise many problems.
- If you do visit a property (particularly in the evening), take someone with you for safety.

Turn to **p4** for a detailed house hunting checklist.

What are Tenancy Deposit Schemes?

If you pay a deposit and have an assured shorthold tenancy, legally your landlord must protect your deposit in a government-backed scheme called a Tenancy Deposit Scheme.

There are two types of tenancy deposit protection schemes available for landlords and letting agents (insurance-based schemes and custodial schemes). Your landlord will incur penalties if they fail to protect your tenancy.

All schemes provide a free dispute resolution service, and enable tenants to get all or part of their deposit back when they are entitled to it.

Your tenancy agreement

If you rent a property which is separate from the landlord's home, the usual type of tenancy for the landlord to provide will be an assured shorthold tenancy.

You and your group will probably all have to sign the same contract. This will be legally binding.

Students renting in the private sector have the same rights as other private tenants. If you all sign one contract, the agent/landlord can hold the whole group responsible if one or more persons in the group stops paying their rent, causes any damage or behaves anti-socially.

If one person falls behind with their rent, the landlord can ask the other tenants to pay.

Some landlords/agents require that parents act as guarantor for payment of rent. Make sure that your guarantor is only underwriting your share of rent and isn't accepting full liability.

If you have any questions about your tenancy agreement contact one of the organisations listed on the back page of this guide.

Illegal eviction

A landlord will be committing the criminal offence of illegal eviction if he/she:

- tries to evict a residential occupier from all or part of his/her home without following the required legal procedure;
- or, behaves in a way that is intended to interfere with the peace or comfort of a resident.

People who live with their landlord e.g. (lodgers) can be evicted without a court order. This means that a landlord can evict a lodger with as little as one week's notice.

Inventory

When you move in, write an inventory of the items in the property and get the landlord to sign it.

Make a note of any defects and damages. If possible, take photographs of the property and its content in case there is a dispute when you move out. Photographs will also help you to remember to put furniture back in its original place when you move out.

Remember to photograph any existing damage within the property e.g. burn marks on the carpet. If you place a newspaper next to the burn it will clarify the size. If you ensure that the date of the newspaper is visible it will eliminate the possibility of the landlord saying that you are responsible. Having evidence makes it much easier to resolve issues.

Do...

...check the name of your landlord with the Housing Advisor at the accommodation office or student union – they can advise if they know of any previous problems.

...inspect properties thoroughly – use our house hunting checklist.

...get your contract checked before signing.

...put in writing (and keep a copy of) any requests for repairs, furniture, etc.

...get written confirmation from the landlord on any promises to carry out repairs, provide furniture, etc.

...ask to see a Gas Safety Register certificate for gas appliances.

Don't...

...hand over any money without getting receipts.

...be rushed into making a decision.

...pay retainers. You could still lose the property, with no guarantee of getting your money back.

...trust everyone all the time! Remember, you have more than likely never met these people before, so don't just hand over your money.

...agree to move into a property that's in a poor state of repair.

...sign a tenancy agreement that does not state how much rent you must pay.

Location

Is the area right for you?

Is transport easily available?

How close is the property to the University?

Are there shops and services nearby?

Your safety at home

Are the passageways of the house clear?

Are smoke detectors or fire alarms fitted? Do they work?

Does the house have any fire doors?

Is there a fire blanket in your kitchen?

Gas and electricity – is everything checked and tested?

Is the heating in the house adequate – will you be warm in the winter?

Do the electric/gas fires work?

Is the cooker gas? Does it work?

Have you see a copy of a Gas Safety Register certificate for the gas appliances?

Security

Is the house secure?

Are all external doors solid?

Have all external doors been fitted with strong and secure locks?

Are ground floor windows fitted with strong and secure catches?

Are there curtains in the downstairs bedrooms?

Outside of the property

Does the roof look sound?

Are the drains clear?

Is any of the woodwork rotting or unsafe?

Are gardens, walls, fences and boundaries maintained?

Repairs

Do any repairs need doing?

Have you agreed with the landlord what will be done, in writing, before you sign the agreement?

Decorating

Will the house need decorating?

If so, who is doing it and who will be paying?

Decorating the house yourself? Get confirmation in writing.

Cleaning

Is the house clean?

Are there any signs of pests (e.g. mouse/rat droppings, slug trails, fleas) in the house?

Plumbing: pipes, boiler, shower, sink, bath, taps, WC

Does the plumbing work?

Have you tried all the taps?

Do the sinks drain?

Does the toilet leak?

Is there a shower, does it work?

Are there enough bathrooms/WCs for all housemates?

Furniture

Has the property got enough furniture for all housemates?

Is there sufficient space in the kitchen to store and prepare food?

What condition is the furniture in?

Is the furniture fire retardant?

Services

What services is the owner providing for you, if any?

What are the parking arrangements?

Got a question?

For advice, support or assistance, please contact:

Private Housing Advisor and Accommodation Office

Email: accommodation@solent.ac.uk,
Tel: 023 8201 6357

Student Hub

Email: student.hub@solent.ac.uk
Tel: 023 8201 5200
Location: Based in RM050

Solent Students' Union

Email: students.union@solent.ac.uk
Tel: 023 8201 3389

Shelter

Web: england.shelter.org.uk
Tel: 0808 800 4444

Southampton Citizens Advice Bureau

Tel: 023 8022 1406

Southampton City Council

Tel: 023 8083 3000



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Email: ask@solent.ac.uk