

Accommodation for international students

June 2007

UKCOSA GUIDANCE NOTE FOR STUDENTS

If you are not a European national, the Immigration Rules state that you must be able to meet the cost of your accommodation in the UK without working or claiming welfare benefits. If your family is with you in the UK, the accommodation must be adequate for their needs. In addition, it is very important for you to have suitable accommodation while you are studying. The standard of your academic work and your health can suffer if your living conditions are not satisfactory.

In many areas of the UK there is a shortage of student accommodation, so **you must start making arrangements as soon as you have been accepted on your course**. This is particularly important if you are planning to bring your family with you to the UK (see our Guidance Note *Your family*).

Before you leave your home country try to arrange some form of accommodation for when you arrive in the UK, even if it is only temporary.

There are two main types of accommodation:

- Accommodation owned, managed and provided by your **institution**, or in partnership with a private company
- Accommodation owned by **private landlords** or **external organisations**, which you will have to find and arrange either by yourself or with the help of advice and suggestions from the accommodation office at the institution.

WHAT TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION ARE PROVIDED BY YOUR INSTITUTION?

Accommodation provided by your institution might be the most suitable type if you are coming to the UK for the first time. It will provide you with opportunities to get to know other students and become involved in the social life of the institution.

The main types of accommodation provided by institutions are:

- **Halls of residence.** These are usually large buildings occupied by many students. Residents live in study bedrooms, either alone or sharing with another student. Bathrooms and other facilities are usually

shared, but some rooms have their own facilities attached to them (this is called "en suite"). Telephones are normally provided on each floor, but some institutions may provide one in each room. Recently-built halls may also offer internet connection in the rooms. Halls can be single sex (male or female only) or mixed (taking both male and female students). Halls of residence can be **catered**, with breakfast and an evening meal included in the price; or **self-catering**, which means that you buy and prepare your own food. Catered halls can be a good option in terms of your budget, but the food may be basic and very different from the food at home.

- **Flats and houses.** Many institutions own flats and houses in the local area and rent these to their students. As in self-catering halls, you buy and prepare your own food. You will share the kitchen and bathroom with the other students. Some institutions also have a small number of self-catering flats for students with families, but there is usually very high demand for these.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR ACCOMMODATION PROVIDED BY THE INSTITUTION?

In most cases accommodation provided by the institution has to be arranged before you come to the UK. When you are offered a place on your course, you will usually be asked if you would like your institution either to provide accommodation or to arrange alternative private accommodation for you. Make sure that you follow the college's application procedures, and in particular, that you meet deadlines for booking accommodation.

When you are making enquiries about accommodation provided by your institution, you should read carefully any information they have sent you and check that you have the answers to the following questions:

- What types of accommodation are available?
- Will I be offered accommodation each year?
- Will I have to leave my accommodation during the vacations?

- Will I have to provide my own bedlinen, towels and kitchen utensils?
- How much does the accommodation cost and what is included in the price?
- Will accommodation be available for my family? (If your family are coming to the UK with you).

Suitable accommodation for students with dependants, especially those with children, is more expensive and is particularly difficult to find in many parts of the UK. You will need to start making arrangements for family accommodation as soon as possible. **Do not travel to the UK with your family unless you have booked accommodation for them in advance.**

WHAT OTHER TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION ARE AVAILABLE?

- **Purpose-built student accommodation**

This is usually halls of residence style but provided by a private company. Your institution can give you details.

- **Hostels**

These are normally owned by charitable organisations. Some hostels provide rooms for both single and married students. They usually provide some meals or have cooking facilities and allow students to prepare their own food. Staying in a hostel can give you the opportunity to become familiar with the area where you are studying and this is an advantage if you want to find private accommodation later.

If you wish to apply for a place in a student hostel, you should do this in advance because many hostels have long waiting lists. You will have to pay a deposit to secure your booking. In some parts of the UK it is difficult to find hostel accommodation, although hostels are more common in London.

Lists of hostels are available from the British Council office in your home country. The British Embassy or High Commission will give you the address of your nearest British Council office; or you can find it on the British Council website at www.britishcouncil.org.

- **Lodgings**

This means renting a room in a private house. The landlord/landlady will also live in the house, perhaps with their family. You will probably have to share the bathroom and kitchen. You may have to fit-in with the family's lifestyle and respect the customs of the household. For example, if there are small children, they may wish to have quiet evenings. Meals may be provided or you may be able to use the kitchen to cook your own food. Lodgings can provide you with good company and support but you will not be completely independent.

- **Bedsits**

A bedsit is a single room, which is both bedroom and sitting-room. There may be several bedsits in one building and these may be occupied by people who are not students. There may not be any cooking facilities in the bedsit, but rather a shared kitchen elsewhere in the building. Bathroom facilities are also shared. You will have to clean your own room, do your own laundry and provide your own bed-linen and towels. Heating can be quite expensive. In a bedsit you will be independent and have a lot of freedom, but it may be lonely. Bedsits vary in size and quality so you should never take a room without seeing it first.

- **Flats and houses**

After you have been in the UK for some time and have found a small group of friends, you may wish to share a furnished flat or house together. You will share the rent, heating and lighting bills, the food bills and the cleaning. This sort of accommodation can be cheaper than the other types but large houses can be difficult to find. Again, you will have to provide your own bedlinen and towels and do your own cleaning.

Note: In the case of bedsits, flats and houses, do not sign any contract you do not fully understand. If you are unsure, take a copy of the agreement to your college accommodation office or welfare officer for their advice.

DEPOSITS

Whichever type of accommodation you choose, you will probably be asked to pay a deposit when you move in, as well as one month's rent in advance. A deposit is a sum of money, usually one month's rent, which you pay to the landlord or property management agent when you move in. This money should be given back to you when you leave the property, on condition that there has been no damage caused during your stay, beyond what could be considered 'normal wear and tear'.

- **Tenancy Deposit Protection**

If you rent property from a private landlord or property management agent **on or after 6 April 2007** and you pay a deposit, the landlord or agent has to protect the deposit in a government authorised scheme. The landlord or agent must give you the details of the deposit protection scheme within 14 days.

There are two types of scheme: a custodial scheme and an insurance based scheme. Under a custodial scheme the landlord or managing agent will pay over your deposit to the Scheme. Under an insurance based scheme, the landlord or agent will keep the deposit. If, at

the end of your tenancy agreement, there is a dispute about some of the deposit, the landlord or agent must pay that amount into the scheme.

In order to avoid disputes about the deposit arising at the end of the agreement, you and the landlord or agent should agree at the beginning of the agreement on the condition of the property through a combination of photographs of the property and an inventory of the contents.

- **How do I get my deposit back?**

If your deposit is protected under the custodial scheme (see above) there may be a slight delay at the end of the agreement in refunding the deposit to you. This may be a problem if you have a bank account in the UK, which you want to close before you go home. However deposits can be returned to overseas bank accounts, but you will be charged for this. Under an insurance based scheme, the landlord or agent keeps control of your deposit and should be able to refund it promptly at the end of the agreement, unless there is a dispute.

If there is a dispute between you and the landlord at the end of the agreement, the part of the deposit that is in dispute will stay in the scheme unless you both agree for the matter to be adjudicated on by a free and independent alternative dispute resolution (ADR) procedure provided by the Scheme. If you do not use the ADR procedure, you will have to resolve the matter through legal proceedings.

If you paid your deposit before April 6 2007 and it is not protected and there is a dispute and the landlord or agent keeps all or part of the deposit when you think it should be returned, get advice from your institution's advice service or Students' Union.

Note that if you paid your deposit before April 6 2007 and you subsequently enter into a new tenancy agreement on or after 6 April 2007 for the same property, your original deposit will become protected and the tenancy deposit protection procedure will need to be followed by the landlord or agent.

You can download a useful leaflet on the tenancy deposit scheme at <www.direct.gov.uk> or tenancydeposit.org. Click on 'leaflets' and then 'leaflets for tenants'. This leaflet gives you important information about the scheme and is available in various languages.

COUNCIL TAX

Council Tax is a system of local taxation, which is collected by local authorities. It is a tax on domestic property and residents in the UK have to pay unless the law provides that they do not have to pay. Full-time students who live with other full-time students or in halls of residence will not have to pay the tax. For further information on the Council Tax, see the UKCOSA Guidance Note on "Council Tax and international students" (on our website www.ukcosa.org.uk, Advice for International Students); or ask for advice at your institution.

WHAT TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION IS AVAILABLE?

- **Hotels and guest-houses**

Guest-houses are similar to hotels but instead of having a restaurant, they may have a dining-room where you have no choice about the meals served. Living in a hotel for a long period of time will be expensive. However, hotels and guest-houses provide useful temporary accommodation which you can reserve while still in your home country. Hostels (see above) also offer temporary accommodation.

HOW DO I FIND ACCOMMODATION?

When you are looking for accommodation, first ask the accommodation or welfare office, or the students' union at your institution. They may have lists of local accommodation available for rent. They may also have inspected the accommodation to check that it is suitable and they can help if you have any problems.

The student officer at your Embassy or High Commission in the UK may be able to give you information about accommodation.

Internet searches, accommodation agencies, local newspapers (for example 'Loot' in London) and advertisements in shop windows or on institution notice boards are useful when you are looking for somewhere to live. Agencies often charge a fee so you should find out how much they will charge before you ask them to look for accommodation for you.

If you take private accommodation, you must read any contract or other document carefully, before you sign, and get a copy for yourself. You must also get receipts for all payments. If you need help with your legal rights, you can get free advice at a local Law Centre or Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).

INSURANCE

Whatever type of accommodation you choose, it is wise to protect your belongings from theft, fire, loss or accidental damage while you are staying in the UK. Companies such as Endsleigh Insurance can provide policies to cover clothes, books, computers, TV, hi-fi equipment and valuables (see address list).

Some halls of residence will automatically include the cost of insurance in their charges - check this before arranging your own policy.

ADDRESS LIST

Please note that much of this temporary accommodation (for example, International Students' House) can be used by international students whilst they look for long-term accommodation in London. Much of it can also be used by international students from elsewhere in the UK visiting London for a weekend or holiday. Please check with the accommodation-provider; and book in advance.

LONDON

Information

London Conference on Overseas Students (LCOS)

LCOS publishes a **London student hostels directory**, which can be accessed via their website <www.lcos.org.uk>.

Both short and long-term accommodation

International Students House (ISH), London

www.ish.org.uk

ISH is a residence and club, for both British and international students. ISH can provide both long- and short-term accommodation: for bookings, see their website or telephone +44 (0) 20 7631 8310.

London Hostels Association Ltd.(LHA)

www.london-hostels.co.uk

54 Eccleston Square

London SW1V 1PG

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7834 9104

(Runs hostels for students)

Goodenough College

www.goodenough.ac.uk

Residential accommodation for Postgraduate students.

Goodenough College

Mecklenburgh Square

London WC1N 2AB

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7837 8888

Temporary accommodation**Hotels; bed and breakfasts; guest-houses****The London Tourist Board**

www.londontouristboard.com

Accommodation bookings can also be made through this website

See **UKCOSA Guidance Note, "Arriving in the UK"** at <www.ukcosa.org.uk> (Advice for International Students).**Emergency accommodation in London****Shelterline – Housing Advice Line**

Tel: 0808 800 4444

(24 hour advice line)

SCOTLAND**Temporary accommodation in Scotland****Scottish Tourist Board**

www.visitscotland.com

(Hotels; bed and breakfasts; guest-houses)

Hostels**Hostels in Scotland**

www.hostelscotland.com

Scottish Independent Hostels

www.hostel-scotland.co.uk

Edinburgh Backpackers Hostel

65 Cockburn Street

Edinburgh EH1 1BU

Tel: +44 (0) 131 220 2200

Fax: +44 (0) 131 477 4636

WALES**Temporary accommodation in Wales****Welsh Tourist Board ("Visit Wales")**

www.visitwales.com

(Hotels; bed and breakfasts; guest-houses)

Hostels in Wales

www.hostelwales.com

NORTHERN IRELAND**Temporary accommodation in N.Ireland****Northern Ireland Tourist Board**

www.discovernorthernireland.com/

Hostels

www.hostelnorthernireland.com/

THROUGHOUT UK**British Tourist Authority**

www.visitbritain.com

(Hotels; bed and breakfasts; guest-houses)

Youth Hostels Association (YHA)

www.yha.org.uk

(Provides lists of Youth Hostels throughout UK, for temporary accommodation)

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)

www.ymca.org.uk

(Provides temporary hostel accommodation for young men and women of any religion, throughout UK)

Endsleigh Insurance

www.endsleigh.co.uk

GUIDANCE NOTES**A complete selection of Guidance Notes is available to download from:****www.ukcosa.org.uk/pages/guidenote.htm**

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