

Housing Guides

Online Housing Agents

How this guide helps

This guide provides a summary of the key guidance from the UK Government's Trading Standards department on what to look out for when engaging with an online housing agent.

As set out in our [guide to accessing help remotely](#) – you can access key information and resources immediately. The information and resources in the guide below may either answer your questions or help give them a further focus before you contact us.

Internet based letting agents and accommodation adverts

When you are planning your year of study in the UK, you may be looking for your accommodation using the internet before you come to the UK, as it is good to know that you will have somewhere to live when you arrive.

However there have been cases reported of letting agents advertising properties to rent online without meeting all the legal requirements for letting agents in the UK. This has led to students not finding anyone to sort out any problems with their accommodation while they are in the UK, or not getting their security deposit back at the end of their stay.

There are a few simple checks you can do which will let you know if the letting agent you are using is operating legally and may help to prevent problems. If they can't answer a few straightforward questions, perhaps you should look elsewhere?

It is also important that you view the property or room before you pay expensive deposits. You want to be sure the house exists, and that you would like to live in it for the next 12 months.

Online agents' checklist

When using an online based agent, make sure you consider the following:

- Does the letting agent have a business address in the city where you are studying? Will you be able to get in touch with them easily if you have to? If they only give you a mobile phone number it may be very difficult to get hold of them.

- Do they make it obvious on the website what **fees** you will have to pay on top of your rent? There are only limited fees an agent can charge, such as holding deposit, security deposit, change of tenants on contract and few others. For more details on what fees they can charge see Shelter guidance [here](#).

□ How will they **protect your security deposit**? Legally they must put your deposit in an official protection scheme, so ask them which one they will use. The official schemes are the Deposit Protection Service, MyDeposits and the Tenancy Deposit Scheme. If they can't tell you which one they use you may not want to trust them with your money.

□ Do they belong to a **letting agents' property redress scheme**? Legally they must belong to an official scheme which will help resolve complaints. It should say on their website which one they belong to – the official schemes are the Property Ombudsman and the Property Redress Scheme.

Important: If the purpose of the online agent's work is only to facilitate a direct transaction between a prospective landlord and prospective tenant, they do not have to be registered with the redress scheme.

Final tips

Do some homework and research (a skill you will find very useful when doing your degree!). Ask around and look on social media sites and groups to establish if problems with a particular letting agency have been reported. You will find more reliable and trusted accommodation through:

- SUSU's own Letting Agency: www.susulettings.co.uk
- University's SASSH accommodation scheme: www.sassh.co.uk

Further Guidance

For further guidance on Online Letting Agents, contact The Advice Centre. • 02380 592 085 • advice@susu.org.

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