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LandlordZONE

AFS/UNIPOL scheme – over 1200 student properties now accredited

February 13, 2013 on 3:23 pm | In [News](#) | [No Comments](#)

Since its launch one year ago, 1221 student properties across 26 UK cities have signed up to the accreditation AFS/Unipol Code, the first nationwide scheme to accredit student landlords who offer high standards of accommodation, with figures predicted to rise to 2500 by the end of 2013.

The Code, created by Accommodation for Students (AFS) (www.accommodationforstudents.com), the UK's No 1 student accommodation website, and Unipol, the charity working to improve training, standards and professionalism in student housing, is a voluntary scheme where landlords commit to maintaining professional standards when managing shared student properties.

It sets out a number of specific standards which rented student properties and their management must adhere to, covering key areas such as comfort, facilities, safety, security and service. So far the code has seen greatest take up in Leeds, Nottingham, Manchester, Durham and Birmingham with plenty more to come in Canterbury, Middlesbrough and Sheffield.

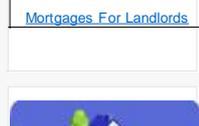
As rents continue to rise in many university towns, students and parents are looking for reassurance that they are getting value for money. A recent survey conducted by AFS suggested that the introduction of the accreditation scheme has been well received throughout the industry with over 90 percent of students saying they would prefer to rent a property that has been physically inspected and accredited.

Similarly, with growing competition in the student accommodation market, professional landlords are keen for their properties to stand out and are benefiting from quality tenants and quicker lettings.

One landlord Mr Karl Kuhwald, who has 30 student properties in Manchester, commented "I signed up to the accreditation scheme thinking it would be a good way for me to publicly state that I manage my properties well. What I didn't realise was how many more enquiries I would receive from AFS as a result of becoming accredited. Highly recommend."

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As part of the accreditation process, standards are physically checked during visits from professional verifiers who are extremely thorough in ensuring the properties are safe and suitable to let.

Dick Scott, one of the property verifiers working with AFS, says “Perhaps the two most important things about the verification process are that someone completely independent checks the property – and that it does really get checked – unlike many other accreditation schemes.” One unique feature about the verification process which is proving very popular is that student tenants are also interviewed and they too learn a lot that helps the landlord/tenant relationship.

According to Amy Royle, Accreditation Officer at Unipol, “An interesting and exciting development” has been the interest shown by Educational Institutions. “Universities and Colleges are increasingly looking for robust accreditation schemes to ensure a good standard of housing for their students, so we are excited that a growing number are now actively promoting the AFS/Unipol Code to the student landlords in their area.

This is particularly true of The University of Exeter which was the first university to officially adopt it and now actively promote it to all student landlords in the City.

University Accommodation Manager, Helen Whyte, comments “When looking for a nationally recognised code, we found that AFS/Unipol met our requirements for landlords and properties as well as covering specific issues in students housing such as upkeep of gardens and rubbish removal. Most importantly, the verification of the Code is through property inspections which we felt was an important part of the process.”

Rob Hunter, founder of Place Group UK and The London Student Group, was one of the first landlords in London to sign up for the code. He comments “Put simply, the code is definitely working for us and I can’t speak highly enough of the accreditation, the outstanding quality of the assessors and the results we have seen.

Compliance with a recognised published standard provides peace of mind to parents and students, and I am passionate about encouraging more landlords to get behind the scheme and help improve standards throughout the sector. I now know that not only are we supplying the very best product we can, but that we have independent acknowledgement of this to show to those considering renting from us and the universities we work with”.

Simon Thompson, co-founder and director of AFS, commented “Although it is still early days, with only pockets of accredited inventory in each city, we are very pleased with both the take up from landlords and reaction from students. I think its success can be attributed to the quality of the inspections taking place as well as the support and advice our verifiers can offer even the most seasoned landlords.”

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Amy Royle also added, "The landlords who undertake to comply with the Code receive the accolade of being recommended by the institution, it's a win-win situation – the standards of student housing are improved, and good landlords are rewarded with marketing advantages."

Since the code is UK wide, it has to be suitable to cover a variety of different student properties. Simon comments "Ensuring the code works for all has been one of the greatest challenges and there have been some tweaks along the way to ensure it complies with new industry regulations. We are now confident that we have a succinct set of standards easily identifiable to students by our 'thumbs up' logo, which we hope in time will be recognised nationwide."

With the busiest time of year fast approaching, when keen first year students start looking for their second year houses, AFS and Unipol are keen to encourage more and more landlords to become accredited and have launched a video to demonstrate how the process works. This can be viewed at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjemwU6_3Dw&feature=youtu.be



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