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Housing: AFS & Unipol launch nationwide student landlord accreditation scheme

theEHP | 6 October, 2011 | 23:51 | Comments (0)

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Accommodation for Students (AFS) and Unipol have partnered to launch the UK's first fully-effective nationwide student landlord accreditation scheme – the AFS/Unipol Code. This at a time when students are just returning to university and first-year students are seeking accommodation (mostly rented) for the first time.

The Code sets a number of specific standards for rented student properties and their management. It covers all properties with up to 14 occupants in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and is consistent with the legal and regulatory requirements in those countries. The Code covers all the key areas of student accommodation: comfort, facilities, safety, security and service and is designed to help students (and their parents) make a more informed choice about accommodation and its quality. It gives national recognition and coherence to properties that might have been previously accredited under a local scheme.



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Martin Blakey, Chief Executive of Unipol, said:

“For some time there has been a concern about the potential lack of quality control on some online accommodation websites and a few student tenants have suffered from inferior standards and, in exceptional cases, fraud. This has not been helped by the patchwork and poorly-understood nature of many existing accreditation schemes.

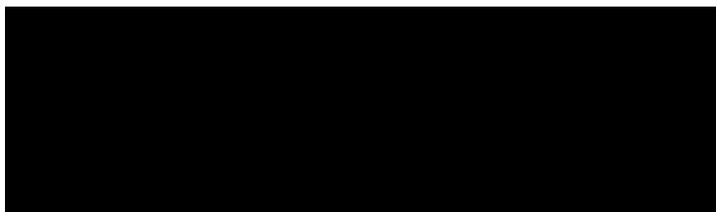
We have chosen to partner AFS because their website is the main one used by student landlords across the UK.

The AFS/Unipol Code puts in place a set of standards that is easily understood by both tenants and landlords and will reassure students and parents that the properties that they rent online have landlords with the requisite management skills and accommodation that meets the Code benchmarks.

Most importantly these standards are physically checked by visits from a team of independent professional verifiers as part of the initial application, and three-yearly thereafter, when membership comes up for renewal.

All this provides huge peace of mind for student tenants letting a property from an accredited landlord – reflected in our ‘thumbs up’ logo.”

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Landlords commit to the AFS/Unipol Code for a minimum three years. On payment of an administration fee they have access to an online training course (using videos and text) providing essential information about renting to students and the Code. Each course module is completed by a short multiple choice quiz. Once the landlords have passed all the modules, they move on to the verification process. Following a visit by an independent, trained inspector they will be issued with a report. On completion of any 'action points' from the report the landlord will be formally accredited, receiving a certificate to this effect, whereupon he can now feature the 'thumbs up' accredited logo against their properties on the AFS website and in situ.

In addition to benchmark standards of safety, security, facilities and comfort the Code also covers the law, health & safety and management standards. All this is designed to minimise misunderstandings and disputes but where they do arise the Code maintains a simple, inclusive, transparent and rapid Complaints and Disputes procedure, arbitrated by an independent Tribunal.

Simon Thompson, co-founder and director of AFS, commented:

"As the No 1 provider of online student accommodation in the UK, we have a vested interest in the high quality of our landlords. We already have a strong internal system to monitor complaints and dubious landlords and hence have few problems in this area.

However, we see this partnership with Unipol and the new AFS/Unipol Code as a big step forward in guaranteeing the high quality of our properties. The benefits to student renters are clear but we should not underestimate the great benefits to landlords who choose to become accredited.

Two recent landlord forums that we have run have shown a great enthusiasm for this initiative, 60% believing it a good idea. The benefits are clear and compelling:

- » accredited landlords stand out to potential tenants and prove that they meet benchmark standards
- » this provides reassurance to students and parents that they are providing a best practice service, ensuring better tenants, quicker lettings and minimising voids
- » the knowledge that the Code is promoted to students by organizations like the NUS
- » as a Code Member they receive practical benefits, like template tenancy agreements and other documents, discounts and newsletters
- » fewer tenant misunderstanding and disputes
- » finally, they are differentiated on the AFS website, and feature the AFS/Unipol Code 'thumbs up' logo

We are delighted to be partners to Unipol, who already have a successful history of landlord accreditation and verification with their properties in Leeds, Bradford and Nottingham.

Pete Mercer, Vice President (Student Welfare), NUS added:

"We actively support this initiative. It represents excellent progress for students in their quest for confidence and peace of mind in the quality of rented student accommodation.

We will be promoting the AFS./Unipol Code and its 'thumbs up' logo to our members."

One of AFS's top landlords has already signed up to the new accreditation scheme. Rob Hunter, MD of the London Student Group, a full service student housing supplier with 11 properties in London, said:

"We wholeheartedly support the AFS/Unipol Code. It will help ensure good quality accommodation and service. I think it's particularly important that properties are physically visited by trained assessors so that information given can be checked and, where necessary, improvements recommended and implemented.

Furthermore, Unipol already has an excellent reputation in this area and AFS leads the way in terms of online student accommodation and so I think that will ensure a high level of participation from landlords across the UK."

Details about the scheme can be found on the AFS/Unipol National Code website at [Unipol website](#) and the [Accommodation for Students \(AFS\) website](#).

Further Information

Unipol Student Homes is a voluntary organisation instrumental in setting up and running the Code. It is a charitable, not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It has a well established track record on accreditation and already accredits over 180,000 student rooms.

Established in 1973 Unipol has evolved to become an accommodation supplier, developer, manager, trainer, lobbyist, policy informer, market influence and voluntary standards setter with national renown and clout. It currently has offices in Leeds, Bradford and Nottingham and undertakes training in Leeds and London. Further information can be found at <http://www.unipol.org.uk/National>

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Accommodation for Students (AFS) is a student accommodation search engine that displays over 44,000 UK properties a year. It is the largest student search engine in Europe.

The **NUS** serves the interests of students and their students' unions which operate alongside, but independently of, education institutions across the country. The NUS provides research, representation, training and expert advice for individual students and students' unions. It has no affiliation to any commercial student accommodation providers. As well as being a key stakeholder in the Code, the NUS plays an important part in its governance.

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About theEHP: I qualified as an Environmental Health Practitioner (EHP) 1999. Between 1999 and 2003 I worked in Local Authority Private Sector Housing Departments as an Environmental Health Practitioner where I specialised in housing. I started working as a Housing Consultant in 2001 and left Local Government in 2003. I have a BSc Hons in Environmental Health and a PG Dip in Housing. I am currently studying a PG Dip in Surveying. I am a member of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and a Student Member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. [View author profile.](#)

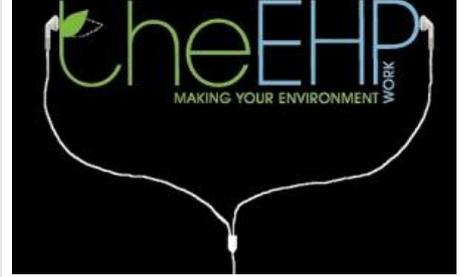


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