

Students warned against contacting “unscrupulous” agency

By [Laura Hughes](#) and [Neil Johnston](#)

Thursday 8 December 2011



A local letting agency formally known as ‘F.L.A.T.S’ has recreated itself under the trading name ‘Student Housing Services’ amid concerns over its “unscrupulous” nature in the past.

The company has been recruiting students by posting adverts into letter boxes but is not registered with ‘Companies House.’ It also does not appear on last year’s University approved list of private sector properties.

The local letting agency, Access Properties, has warned students to avoid ‘Student Housing Services’ at all costs. They believe the change in name, which legally F.L.A.T.S is at liberty to do, is a response to its tarnished reputation. According to one landlord who used F.L.A.T.S last year, the company’s management was “unscrupulous”.

Student tenants, currently in their properties, have been handing over rent which was not always being passed on to the Landlord. In conjunction, repairs and routine maintenance were not being carried out, obtaining paperwork “was a nightmare” and the “horror stories from [other] students were appalling” according to one resident.

“

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Current resident

Payments for property improvements have not been passed onto contractors and one company has had to pay large legal costs to receive their payment from F.L.A.T.S.

A current tenant of a property let by F.L.A.T.S told Nouse that, “the whole experience has just been one of incompetence; we have had to constantly ring her regarding things being wrong. If I could give advice to anyone it would be to stay clear, get housing through the University and make sure you do your

research.”

The students of this particular let were not asked for a guarantor. This is not a legal requirement, but protects the landlord in the event of the student defaulting on his or her debt, as the guarantor would be held liable for the remainder of the rent.

These tenants have not received a copy of the property’s gas certificate, despite multiple requests. Under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998, this is the landlord’s legal obligation; F.L.A.T.S itself is listed as the Landlord on these students tenancy agreement.

Robert MacMahon, from Access Properties York, revealed that he had, “come across an agency named F.L.A.T.S. in the past. Whilst I am sure they must have had some satisfied landlords and customers, I have yet to meet them.”

On one occasion, Access Properties were asked by a student to help contact F.L.A.T.S regarding an urgent matter with a property they were living in, as they were unable to find any contact details, “which is an unusual practice for a genuine trading organisation.”

The agency ‘Student Housing Services’ provides an email address, but there is no telephone number or website information. The typed A4 advertising leaflet, was posted to Halifax, Goodricke and James colleges and immediately James College’s Administrator sent out an email to students strongly advising against responding to the leaflet, as it was “very badly written” and “very strange”.

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Robert MacMahon, Access Properties York

The Vanbrugh College Administrator also sent out an email stating that Bob Hughes, YUSU Welfare Officer, had said the company were “suspicious” and that “Student Housing Services is not a registered company and students are recommended to be wary of contacting them.”

Hughes, also asked: “That all students stay calm and avoid signing for houses yet. There are a great number of houses in the private sector, and so any publicity that is trying to pressure students into signing now is putting undue stress on students unnecessarily, especially as the approved list of private sector properties comes out on February 3rd.”

The University has a contract checking service, and Hughes sought to “encourage students to use that before signing any contracts, as once they are signed, as they are very difficult to get out of.”

A spokesperson for the University stated that they cannot stop students from going with specific companies because of, “legal constraints”. However, they said that they “aim to provide enough information to students to enable them to make an informed choice when are looking for somewhere to live”.



One comment

Mini

17 Dec '11 at 4:20 pm

*Formerly.

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