

## Unipol Student Homes

### Housing Hub Advisor

#### General Information

Unipol is a housing Charity established in 1973 by the University and the then Polytechnic in Leeds in co-operation with their Student Unions. In 1997, Unipol became an incorporated Charitable Company with a Board structure.

Unipol provides assistance in finding and supplying housing for students in Nottingham, Leeds and is the main private sector service supplier for the University of Bradford and Bradford College, Leeds Beckett University, the University of Leeds, Nottingham Trent University, The Northern College of Contemporary Dance, Leeds City College, Leeds Arts University and Leeds College of Music.

Unipol fulfils four distinct but connected roles:

- it has its own Housing Section which develops, takes into ownership and manages refurbished properties and lets them directly to students. Unipol is currently responsible for housing around 3,000 students (including over 210 student families) located in Leeds, 270 students in Nottingham and 59 students in Bradford

- it runs three Housing Hubs providing a forum in which owners (including Unipol) can advertise their properties. Although owners are asked to pay a fee for Unipol's services the Housing Hubs are partially funded by the institutions listed above. Unipol's websites, which centralises all private sector vacancies, are a major source of information and advice for students and receives around 100 million hits a year

- Unipol runs a number of successful voluntary accreditation schemes for owners letting to students that covers 79% of student housing need in Leeds, 65% in Nottingham and 99% in Bradford. The Codes are designed to maintain and improve property and management standards. In Leeds Unipol runs the Leeds Rental Standard for the City Council and in Nottingham Unipol, together with DASH (Decent and Safe Homes) runs the Nottingham Standard.

Unipol has a stake in two Government Approved Codes of Practice dealing with larger student developments in the United Kingdom. Unipol currently accredits an estimated 340,000 student bed spaces.

- through its training arm "Unipol Training" Unipol is the main national trainer in the niche market of student accommodation, running a full annual programme. The training arm also undertakes some bespoke in house training and a number of briefings for different constituencies. Unipol has in-house training facilities in both Nottingham and Leeds.

Unipol is currently following a *Forward Look* designed to maintain and upgrade its services to meet the increasing needs of its student clientele and increase its own accommodation services. A copy of this can be found at <https://www.unipol.org.uk/getattachment/Footer/Governance/Corporate-Documents-Unipol-Board/ForwardLook-2019-2022/Forward-Look-2019-2022-Final.pdf.aspx> on Unipol's website.

***Unipol is organised into six operational areas:***

i) the Senior Management Team consists of the Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Executive, the Director of Finance, the Assistant Chief Executive - Housing, the Assistant Chief Executive - Hub Services, the Assistant Chief Executive - Standards and the Assistant Chief Executive - Communications and IT.

The Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive are supported by an Office and Homestay Coordinator.

ii) The organisation has a technical services arm that is led by the Assistant Chief Executive - Communications and IT who oversees an IT Manager, an Applications Developer, an ICT Officer and two part time support staff to ensure that the organisation maintains high quality IT and web services.

iii) Housing Services and the Housing Hub is an integrated service and the staff teams operate operationally together. Certain Housing Hub operations are overseen by the Assistant Chief Executive - Hub Services and she is assisted by a number of Housing Hub Assistants. ***The Housing Hub Advisor is part of this team and is answerable to the Assistant Chief Executive - Hub Services.***

The Housing team is overseen by the Assistant Chief Executive - Housing and consists of the Housing Manager - Logistics and Compliance, the Housing Manager - Operations and the Development Manager (who is directly answerable to the Chief Executive).

In Leeds and Bradford day to day housing management is carried out by two housing management teams, each with a Team Leader who have an assistant to assist them in administrative matters supported by two Housing Management Assistants. Across both team there are seven Senior Housing Management Officers and Housing Management Officers. The teams are supplemented by Residents' Assistants (currently 16) and a number of part time Housing Assistants over the summer (normally seven who are overseen by one of the Team Leaders).

In Nottingham the housing management service has a Senior Housing Management Officer supported by an Assistant Housing Management Officer and two Residents' Assistants. The housing management team is supported by a Leeds-based Team Leader and an on-site housing management presence of a least one day a week. Although the Nottingham Services Officer oversees the day to day operations of the Nottingham Office, the housing management functions falls under the Assistant Chief Executive - Housing operations.

Located within the housing management team but directly answerable to the Deputy Chief Executive is the Tenancy Support and Wellbeing Coordinator and the Residential Assistants Coordinator.

iv) The Standards Team is headed by the Assistant Chief Executive - Standards who oversees all accreditation and tribunal systems which is coordinated by the Unipol Codes Administrator and a National Codes Administrator together with the Complaints and Code Investigator. Marketing, both in respect of brand and lettings, falls within this team and is undertaken by the Digital Marketing Coordinator and the Marketing Coordinator. The team also has the Conferences, Events and Design Officer who operates Unipol's conference operation.

v) the Nottingham Service is led, on a daily basis by the Nottingham Services Manager (who is overseen by Assistant Chief Executive - Hub Services) and consists of a Senior Housing Management Officer and an Assistant Housing Management Officer and a number of part time Residential Assistants (currently two).

vi) the Finance Team is headed by the Director of Finance and consists of a Finance Manager, a Senior Finance Officer and three full-time and one part time Finance Assistants supplemented by consultants for project work from time to time.

**About this post:**

***This is a newly established post, based in the Housing Hub in Leeds, and is intended to provide additional support and help to both students and landlords using Unipol's services.*** This help takes the form of both general and individual advice. The post will also provide additional capacity to a number of mechanisms Unipol currently operates to support student housing standards: web chat help and advice, operating the Rate Your Landlord service, using the Unipol Code Complaints system to resolve disputes and involving and working with statutory and regulatory agencies enforcing standards where necessary.

This new post is also designed to provide greater focus and expertise in giving both pro-active targeted advice and reactive advice to both students and landlords and build closer working relationships with other housing advice responses both within the educational institutions and their students' unions and in agencies including those within Leeds City Council (property licensing, trading standards and environmental health).

**This post is for a fixed term of 2 years in the first instance and is for 24 hours a week and carries a University Grade 5 Salary £22,659 to £26,243 per annum (pro rata) according to qualifications and relevant experience.** Hours of work will be following agreement with the Assistant Chief Executive - Housing Hub Services. All those working in Unipol are jointly employed by Unipol Student Homes and the University of Leeds. There will be a six month probationary period.

Because the post involves working with students under the age of 18 a satisfactory DBS check (enhanced disclosure procedure) is required to undertake the duties of the post.

The post holder will have experience of advice in a housing context or of advising and assisting students more generally within a student services or students' union environment. They will have excellent communication skills and experience of working with a wide range of colleagues and external agencies within this field.

The post holder reports to the Assistant Chief Executive - Hub Services. It is preferable that the successful candidate should have an operable driving license and be willing to drive to fulfil the duties of the post. The post is based in Leeds but the post holder will be expected to work occasionally in Nottingham.

All those working in Unipol are jointly employed by Unipol and the University of Leeds. The post may involve some limited late night working (up to 7.00pm) and weekend work at specific times of the year, together with the need to undertake cover and call-out arrangements over some public holidays when arrangements for dealing with emergencies have to be made by the Housing Manager. The post holder is also required to work some early mornings on a rota to answer telephone enquiries about repairs.

Unipol, the University of Leeds and the other universities and organisations are multi-cultural communities, which value diversity. The Housing Hub Advisor is expected to treat all individuals fairly, with dignity and respect and contribute to creating a safe, supportive and welcoming environment for all.

### **Specific Duties of the Post Include:**

#### Student Advice

The Housing Hub Advisor is based in the Leeds Housing Hub and will undertake a considerable amount of face-to face contact with students. Much of Unipol's advice and help is virtual, through well-targeted informational videos, the growing use of Web Chat and via blogs and email and the Housing Advisor will use all of these tools to maximise their role. Unipol also operates a Hub in Nottingham and Bradford and these will be supported by the Housing Hub Advisor using virtual means.

Unipol has a wide-reaching student information role, with publications, social media and its web site, all providing timely pro-active advice to students as part of them taking high quality decisions about their house hunting (normally after they have lived in halls for the first year). The Housing Hub Advisor has an important role, with other specialist staff, in ensuring the accurate targeting of the most useful information at the most needed times of the year in the housing cycle.

The Housing Hub Advisor will:

- provide general housing advice to students searching for accommodation in the private sector
- provide a contract checking service for students
- give advice, including simple legal advice to students and landlords, calling on the existing resources of the organisation and directing customers to existing

advice sources. For more complex matters the back-up advice of a solicitor is available

- build strong links with the students' unions and the institutions student services area where students can be referred for direct advocacy, normally with a direct referral being made
- work closely with Leeds City Council's licensing and trading standards teams who can enforce legislation and regulation when breaches have been identified
- make full use of the Unipol Code complaints system and will work with the Complaints Investigator who sees those complaints through the accreditation system
- have a good knowledge of the advice sections on the Unipol website for both students and landlords and will work with other members of staff to make sure that the information is accurate and kept up-to-date
- set up promotional stalls and engage with students to advise them on house hunting, Unipol properties or other housing matters
- assist with open days and mixing events for Colleges and Universities that use Unipol's services as requested
- assist in running and participating in house hunting events (either in Leeds or Nottingham) particularly those held at relatively short notice to deal with first year "overspill" arrangements when individual institutions cannot house all of their first year students as originally planned
- assist students:
  - in their negotiation with landlords and agents, to include letter/e-mail writing and helping students to complete small claims court processes when necessary
  - in the use of the web site within the Hub
  - with particular housing needs such as disabled students and families referring them to the correct member of staff, if required
  - who are house hunting for a single room and direct them to properties which are showing as individual lets or to attend events where they can meet other students.

### Landlord Advice

As is the case with students, Unipol has a wide-reaching landlord information role, with publications, social media and its web site, all providing timely pro-active advice to them explaining their legal and other obligations in respect of both letting their properties and providing a first-rate student experience. The Housing Hub Advisor has an important role, with other specialist staff, in ensuring the accurate targeting of

the most useful information at the most needed times of the year in the housing cycle.

The Housing Advisor will:

- ensure that information is provided to landlords about legislative and regulatory changes in a timely manner and that the website is updated as appropriate
- check on a cross-section of non-accredited landlords using Unipol's website to ensure regulatory compliance is being achieved
- answer enquiries from landlord on Web Chat
- establish a Landlord Clinic to run for three hours a week at publicised hours (that can be accessed in person or virtually) to assist landlords and direct landlords enquiring about matters at other times of the week to this facility
- take a significant part in a programme of landlord training, in close co-operation with the Conferences, Events and Design Officer and the Assistant Chief Executive - Housing Hub
- answer enquiries from interested landlords in respect of using Unipol's other services (the web site and accreditation).

#### Rate Your Landlord

Unipol, in partnership with Leeds University Union, operates a unique Rate Your Landlord service within Leeds, allowing students to rate their landlord on a popular web site. The Housing Advisor will assist the Assistant Chief Executive - Hub Services in:

- responding to any enquiries about the service and how it operates
- helping to run the Rate Your Landlord review site ensuring that all notices being displayed on the web comply with Unipol's general policies and the follow the rules pertinent to each site and undertaking the moderation of the student comments in line with established policies

Electronic moderation of the Rate Your Landlord requires that messages are screened regularly, including weekends, and a rota of staff ensures that moderation takes place 365 days a year. Home computing facilities are provided to ensure that moderation can be undertaken from home.

#### Student to Student Noticeboards

The Housing Hub Advisor will promote, monitor and police the Student to Student Noticeboards and undertake the moderation of the noticeboards in line with established policies. Again, moderation of the Noticeboards requires that messages are screened regularly, including weekends, and a rota of staff ensures that moderation takes place 365 days a year. Home computing facilities are provided to ensure that moderation can be undertaken from home.

### Staff Recruitment, Training and Induction

The Housing Hub Advisor has an important role to play in all three of these areas in respect of those working in the Housing Hubs and operating the systems there and will assist, in close co-operation with the Deputy Chief Executive, the training and induction of all new staff in the Housing Hubs to ensure that new staff fully understand the systems within which they work and understand how to operate these.

### Governance

The Housing Hub Advisor takes part in a number of aspects of the charity's governance. These forums include:

- attending and preparing papers as requested by the Assistant Chief Executive - Housing Hub for *the Leeds and Bradford Services Group* and is expected to attend meetings of *the Leeds and Bradford Services Group* which meets at least twice a year.
- being a member of the *Project Groups* established with both Leeds University Union and Leeds Beckett's Students' Union which includes oversight of the Rate Your Landlord service and writing papers for this, as requested, and attending the meetings (normally three times a year for each Group).
- attending the *Owners' Consultative Group* in Leeds.

The Housing Hub Advisor also has an important key role to play in speaking at two *Briefing Meetings* held throughout the year to owners, partners and others interested in Unipol services and role.

### Financial Systems

The Housing Hub Advisor will:

- be aware of relevant budgets and bring to the attention of the Assistant Chief Executive - Housing Hub Services if items are likely to run over budget
- take responsibility for following all of the normal day to day financial procedures required of them whilst undertaking their duties and will follow the systems as laid down by the Finance Manager and, in the event that they are in doubt about any of those systems, will ask for advice as to how to proceed.

### General Duties

The post holder will maintain a working knowledge of Unipol's computer operations and shall have a working knowledge of Microsoft Office software. The Housing Hub Advisor will undertake such general duties within Unipol as from time to time may be required and shall accept periodic revisions of this job specification where transferable skills are utilised.

## **Person Specification**

### **Essential**

- Experience of giving advice in a housing and/or higher education setting;
- Experience of delivering training;
- Good understanding and use of social media;
- A commitment to and experience of delivering excellent customer service;
- Good organisational skills with the ability to work autonomously and organise your own workload, under the guidance of the Manager;
- Excellent communication skills, both written and oral and the ability to communicate effectively with different stakeholders;
- A flexible approach, with the ability to adapt priorities to meet deadlines and conflicting demands as peak workloads require;
- A full operable driving licence.

### **Desirable**

- Experience of preparing or support with legal paperwork;
- Experience of contract checking;
- An understanding of property licencing, trading standards and environmental health;
- Experience of advising landlords;
- Experience of assisting with events;
- Experience of working with students or young people.