

In one sense, students are a property owner's dream tenants. They rent by the year, there are plenty of them and they never get so settled in a place that you can't shift them.

In another sense, they are a complete nightmare: a wild, transient crowd who are a threat not just to your fixtures and fittings but to the peace and quiet of the whole neighbourhood.

Traditionally, it has been fear of this uglier side that has prompted landlords to advertise for quiet young professionals rather than rumbustious young undergraduates. Now, however, a property management company in Edinburgh – run by young professionals – claims to have tamed the beast in the city's college-going population. And it guarantees landlords that the students it puts into their properties will be altogether more *University Challenge* than *The Young Ones*.

How do they do this? For starters, Splendid Property Management will not let to anyone who has not worked for them (they also run a corporate events business which needs scores of part-time waiters and waitresses).

"When you employ someone over a period of time, you get to know what they're like, how reliable they are," says Splendid's director James Brooks, who is only 28 himself. "So when it comes to renting out a property to them, you've got a pretty good idea of whether they'd be responsible tenants or not."

As well as ensuring his students come equipped with the right characteristics, Mr Brooks also provides detailed instructions on how to be model tenants in the course of a 90-minute long induction session.

"During that talk, we make it clear to our tenants that they're expected to get to know their neighbours, to go round and introduce themselves," says Mr Brooks. "And we get them to do their bit and clean the communal stairwell at least once a month. Plus, we tell them to keep their music down and not pour hot fat down the sink because it blocks the drains."

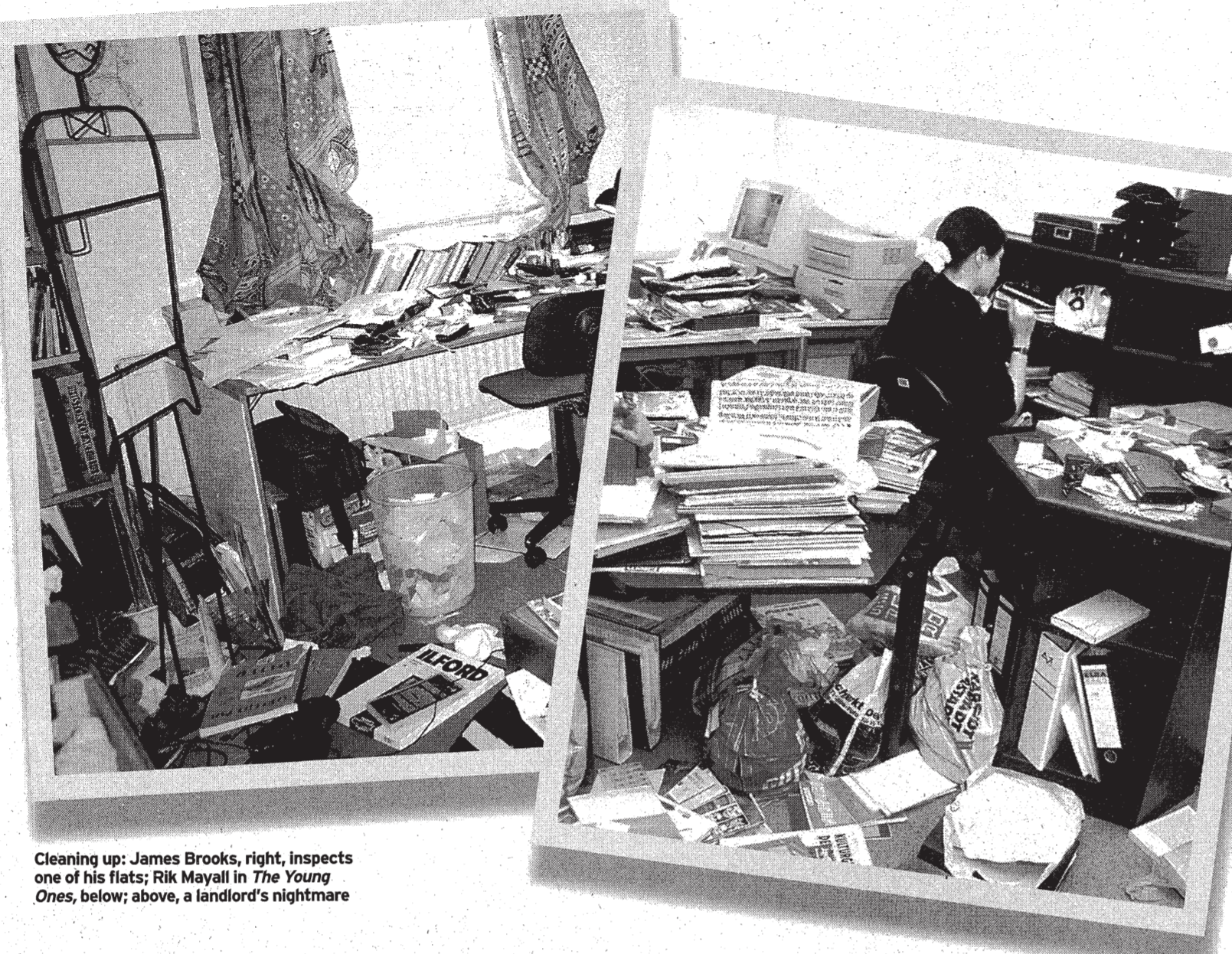
In addition to insisting that students take this crash course in civilised behaviour, Mr Brooks writes to everyone living in the vicinity of the flat, listing the names of the new tenants and giving the Splendid phone number in case of complaints. As a further safeguard, he inspects each property (there are 16 of them) every two months, issuing formal requests for a clean-up in the event of standards slipping.

"I'm not interested in whether there are clothes all over the floor, but what I do want to see is if they're doing anything that threatens the fabric of the place," he says. "The other day, for example, I went to visit a flat where they hadn't de-filtered the washing machine for weeks, and had left bits of food all over the kitchen floor, which was going to attract mice."

"I let them know I wasn't happy, asked them to sort it out, and when I went back three days later, the place was fine."

It's all very different, of course, from the 1960s and 1970s. In those days, conventional undergraduate wisdom was that all property was theft, and that landlords were class enemies hell-bent on cheating the student masses out of their legitimate economic rights (ie beer money).

Of course, one of



Cleaning up: James Brooks, right, inspects one of his flats; Rik Mayall in *The Young Ones*, below; above, a landlord's nightmare

Taming of the wild bunch

Students aren't what they used to be, finds Christopher Middleton. And after a good talking to by an Edinburgh company, they turn into model tenants

the reasons why today's students are less bolshie than their forbears is that there are so many more of them. In Edinburgh alone there are 50,000, spread over half-a-dozen different

academic institutions; as a result, there is fierce competition for the best places to live.

"It's almost impossible to find anything for less than £285 per person per month," says Ruth Cameron,

president of the Edinburgh Students Association. "And when a good place does come on the market, there's always a scramble to get it. People race each other across town to get their forms in first."

"It's got so bad that if you want to make sure of a flat for September you have to take over the lease in April or May, then rent it out during the Edinburgh Festival."

That is if you can get a place at all. "There are some landlords and lettings agencies in Edinburgh which just don't like students," says 21-year-old Matthew McLuckie, a third-year geography undergraduate who rents an apartment in Scotland Road along with three other flatmates.

"And places for four or five people are almost impossible to find."

Given this climate, then, the students don't make a scene when required to sit through an hour-and-a-half lecture on good behaviour from the lettings agent.

"We didn't mind at all," said third-year business and economics student Richard Black, 21. "They sat us down, told us what they expected from us and, to be honest, it all seemed pretty reasonable. In return, we've got a really great flat for six on the Royal Mile at £370 per month each. So we haven't exactly been hard done by."

But it's not just the students who are on the receiving end of Splendid's pep talks. The landlords, too, get given their share of dos and don'ts. "At the same time as reassuring them that our tenants won't damage their property, we also make sure

they understand that there is going to be reasonable wear and tear on the premises," says Mr Brooks. "After four or five years, even the best looked-after flat is going to need re-decoration."

Again, landlords do not seem to mind this hands-on approach. "I first came across Splendid through a friend who'd done waitressing for their events business," says Katherine Campion, who rents out a flat in the Newington part of the city. "It does actually seem like more of a personal than a business relationship. I feel I know them, and that they know the students in my flat."

Keeping these lines of communication open isn't just about making everyone feel comfortable, either. Without this sense of personal connection, students can grow careless both of the property they're living in – and of the people living around them. Which in Scotland can result in a landlord being forbidden to rent out that property any more.

"Any place with three or more tenants who aren't related must have an HMO (House in Multiple Occupation) licence," says Mr Brooks. "And if that particular flat has been the subject of complaints about late-night parties and loud music, the

property can have its HMO licence refused the next time the landlord applies for a renewal, which is once every two years."

It is better for everyone, then, if students and local residents live side by side in an atmosphere of mutual respect and volume control. But aren't all students meant to be wayward rebels, sworn not to conform with society's norms?

"Not at all," says Richard Black. "I think it's only right that we should feel a sense of responsibility towards our neighbours. I'd hate it, say, if the lady living downstairs from us felt intimidated about coming up and ask us to turn our music down."

"What a lot of people forget is that for many students this is the first time they've lived away from home, and a lot of them may just not realise that they are affecting other people. We don't resent guidelines on how to behave; we see it more as acquiring skills that will stand us in good stead throughout our working lives."

Not exactly Che Guevara, is it? But in the long run, it achieves that hallowed goal of all 1960s students – make peace not war.

● Splendid Property Management, 3 Broughton Place, Edinburgh (0131 557 6611; www.splendidproperty.co.uk).



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