



# STUDENT CRIBS | CASE STUDY

## EXETER

HMO landlords like Student Cribs face a dilemma when it comes to energy bills. Tenants love the convenience and peace of mind of paying rent with their bills included, but then they have no incentive not to waste energy. We interviewed Student Cribs to find out if Genius Hub helped them to keep energy costs under control while keeping their tenants happy.

### THE STORY OF STUDENT CRIBS

In 2003, frustrated by being rejected by landlords just because he was a student, Charlie Vaughan-Lee started Student Cribs. Initially he bought and renovated three properties, which he let to friends. Now, two decades later, Student Cribs manages over 5000 rooms in around 1000 properties across the country.

They pride themselves on providing comfortable, well-equipped student houses in the best locations in university cities and towns. Tenants pay a simple, all-inclusive price, including electricity, heating, hot water and other utilities.

### THE CHALLENGES OF MANAGING HEATING AT SCALE

HMO properties are notorious for being wasteful with energy, with tenants in bills-included properties often turning up the central heating thermostat when they're cold, but opening windows when it's too hot! Meanwhile, landlords typically have little ability to manage energy consumption in their properties.

Student Cribs has been tackling this challenge using smart heating controls, allowing their team to monitor heating settings remotely and ensure that heating is reduced to the frost setting when students leave during holiday periods.

**Tom Ferber (Director)** *"We want to save energy, but it's always really important that our tenants are comfortable and that the heating system is easy for them to control. The risks of trying a new control system are small because these are small properties, but the potential energy saving is huge."*

Previously they have used another smart thermostat system, but it didn't support the control of electric heating, which they needed for their properties in Swansea. That's when they looked around for alternatives and discovered Genius Hub.

### WHY DID THEY CHOOSE GENIUS HUB?

Their Swansea properties use electric convection heaters, which are expensive to run - but replacing them with a new heating system would be a major investment. Instead, they turned to Genius Hub to control each individual heater, as well as the immersion heaters for hot water.

**"If a tenant does have an issue with their heating, it's great to be able to immediately log into Genius Hub and solve it remotely."**

*"The price was excellent, and our experience of the Genius Hub team is that they're engaged and helpful. We were a bit concerned about needing to replace batteries frequently, as we'd had that problem with another heating control system. And of course, we never know whether the energy savings will be as much as predicted."*

Typically in a HMO with electric heating, a Genius Hub can pay for itself in well under 2 years; sometimes in less than a year. To put that to the test, Student Cribs installed Genius Hub into eight terraced properties in Swansea.



This Genius Hub installation uses motion sensors to detect when tenants are home, turning off each room's electric heater automatically when they leave. When the property is completely vacated, it even turns off the immersion heater in the hot water tank, helping save even more energy during holiday periods. As soon as the first tenant returns, the hot water automatically turns back on.

Even though they could use their existing heating control solution with properties that use gas boilers, Student Cribs were curious to see how Genius Hub compares. So they chose to also install our full, motion-sensing heating controls in four of their properties in Exeter, using wireless valve heads to control each room's radiators individually.

It is true that installing individual room control normally leads to a longer payback period than installing a simpler, cheaper Genius Hub system that only provides whole house control.

However, installing the "full package" can bring greater energy savings over the long term, and helps insulate Student Cribs from any future gas price increases.

Also, because each Genius Room Sensor also measures temperature, it allows them to avoid excessive electricity bills by easily identifying when tenants are using electric heaters.

### WHAT'S IT BEEN LIKE TO USE GENIUS HUB

Ferber continues; *"The installation was easy; the contractors installed it as part of the renovation they were doing on the properties. The controls for Genius Hub are easy to use, and it integrates really easily with how the tenants use the buildings."*

*It doesn't have many points of failure; generally we've found that once it's up and running, you can just leave it alone. That works well for our type of tenants. We like that Genius Hub just automatically takes care of everything, so we're not heating empty rooms; we're saving energy."*

Although it's mainly a 'fit and forget' solution, landlords like Student Cribs can still easily monitor heating settings across multiple properties in one place: our 'Multi-Hub Dashboard'.

*"If a tenant does have an issue with their heating, it's great to be able to immediately log into Genius Hub and solve it remotely. And we can easily see whether they're using electric heaters. As soon as the staff at head office saw what Genius Hub could do, they all thought that it's great and wondered why we're not using it in all our other properties!"*

***"The price was excellent, and our experience of the Genius Hub team is that they're engaged and helpful."***

