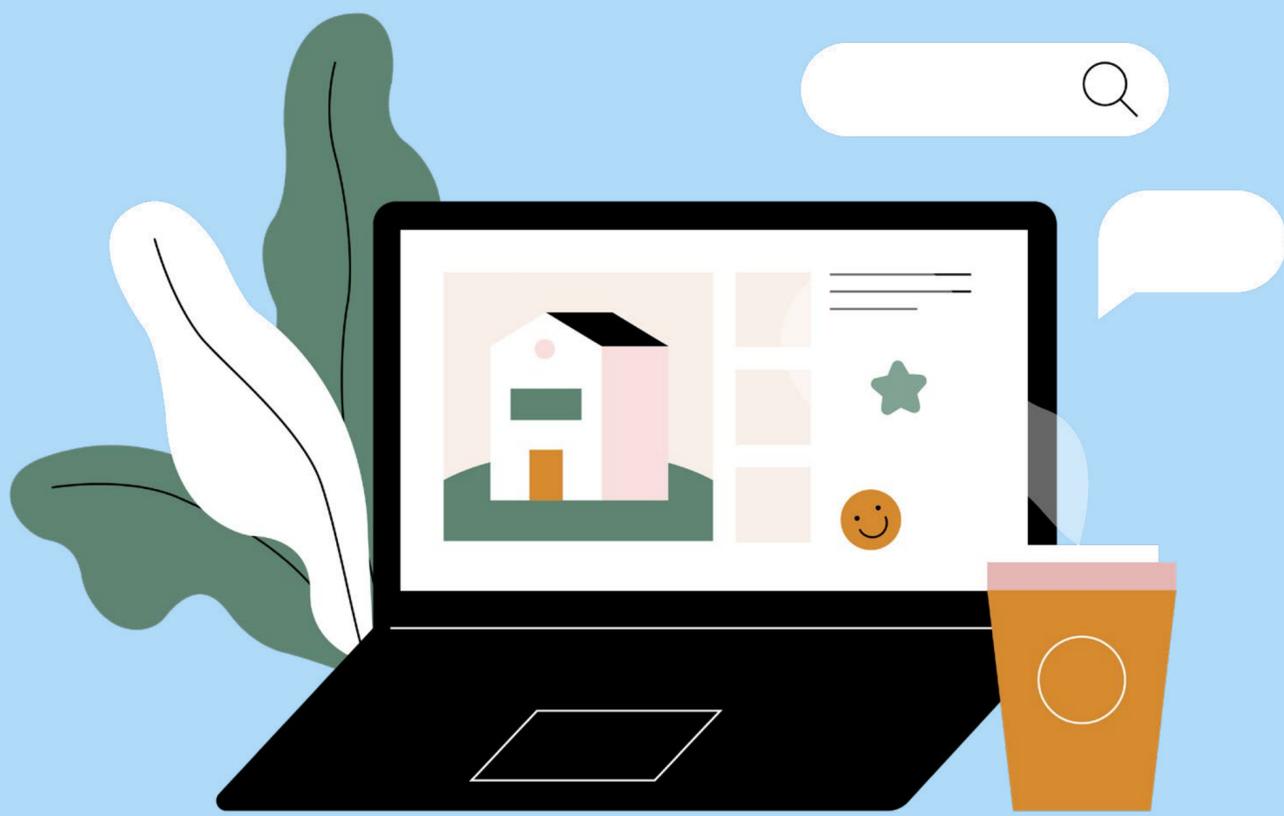


- Your ultimate guide to entering the private rented sector •



# The House Hunting Guide

Brought to you by

**The Advice Centre** by BCUSU

# BENTLEY HOUSE

## Birmingham

Student accommodation with a difference.



Bentley House 

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THE  
**STUDENT**  
HOUSING  
COMPANY

# Hello!

**At your Students' Union we know that there are lots of things to consider when choosing where to live.**

This is why we have put together this short guide to help you make the right choice.

Make sure not to rush into any decisions or sign any contracts before considering all of your options.

Your Students' Union Advice Centre are always on hand to talk through the more mind boggling aspects of house hunting. We also have our own letting agency; **Student Homes by BCUSU**, who can help you find properties that are suitable and within your price range, and can also help you to find flatmates.

We hope you find this guide useful, however if you need any help or guidance with anything to do with house hunting, please do not hesitate to contact us.

**Log an enquiry** to speak to one of our Advice Centre's friendly advisers. We also have lots of useful information online at **[bcusu.com/advice](https://bcusu.com/advice)**

*J. c. Shah*

**Jinal Shah**  
**VP Equity and Inclusion**



# Before you start looking...

It's important you make the right decision, not a rushed decision.

## MYTH

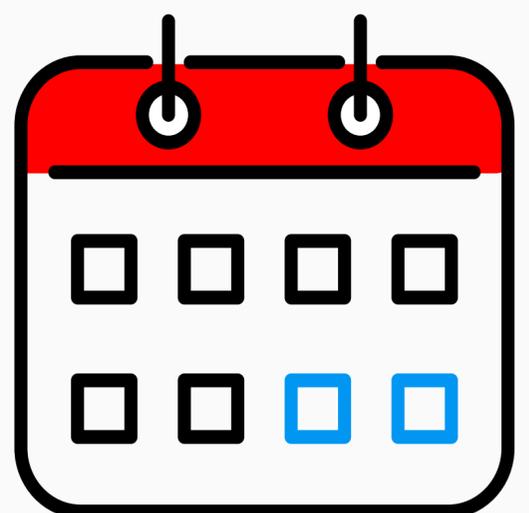
I have to sign-up for next year's housing before Christmas or all the good housing will be gone.

## FACT

There are hundreds of good quality student homes in Birmingham. Choosing accommodation shouldn't be stressful, so slow down and think carefully about what you want.

Don't get pressured into signing agreements before you've had the chance to consider your options. The best time to find a house is from January to April.

The Advice Centre offers a **contract checking service** as well as **budgeting advice**, so **log an enquiry** and let us help you!



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**Houses**

**Studios**

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**Virtual Tours!**

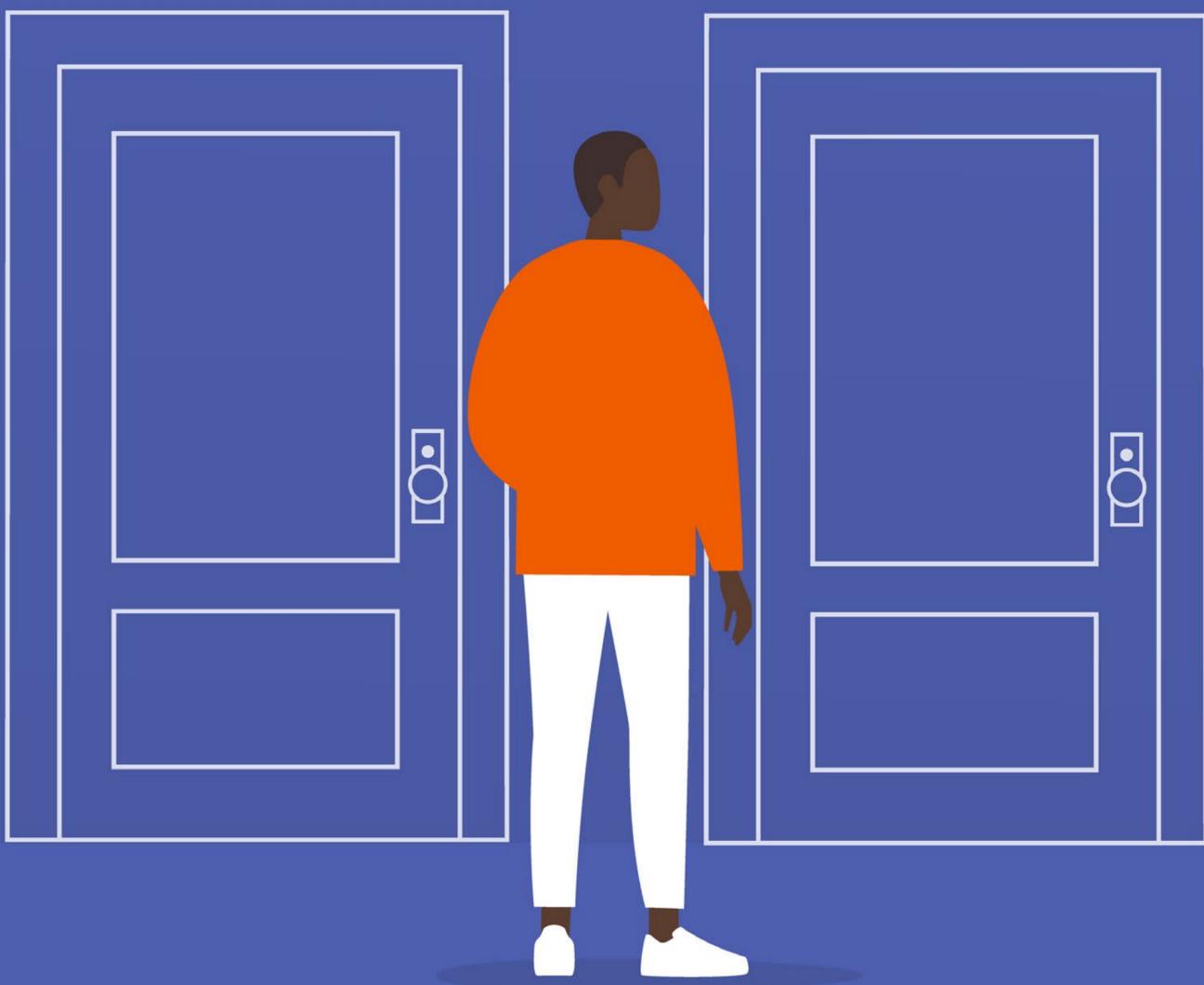
**Search Now at  
[bcusu.com/homes](http://bcusu.com/homes)**

Birmingham City  
**Student Homes**  
by BCUSU

# Before you start looking...

## Consider all options for next year

Is it worth signing a contract in the current climate? Unless there is a clause in the tenancy agreement, you'll be stuck paying rent if you change your mind and commute. Make sure to think it through.



# Before you start looking...

## **Nail the numbers!**

How many people do you want to live with? Are the people that you have chosen reliable? Will you be able to study in the environment that you have chosen? Factors to consider include any rooms you will need, who gets the bigger room (if there is one), if you need a garden or car parking and who will organise utility payments.

## **Choose your friends carefully!**

It's better to know now if someone is going to be unreliable with rent payments or if they'll be a messy housemate. These are things that will affect everyone living in the house.

## **Location, Location, Location!**

Where do you want to live? Amongst other students, or in a quieter area? Are you prepared to travel, and how much will public transport cost? Do you know the area, does it feel safe both during the day, and at night?

# Before you start looking...

## What's your budget?

Factor in the utility bills and any commuter costs to arrive at an affordable monthly or annual budget. Can everyone in your group afford the rent and the deposit up-front? It's better to have up front and honest discussions at this stage.

## Guarantor

Do you need someone to guarantee your rent? This will usually be a parent or another family member. If you're struggling, try [housinghand.co.uk](https://www.housinghand.co.uk)

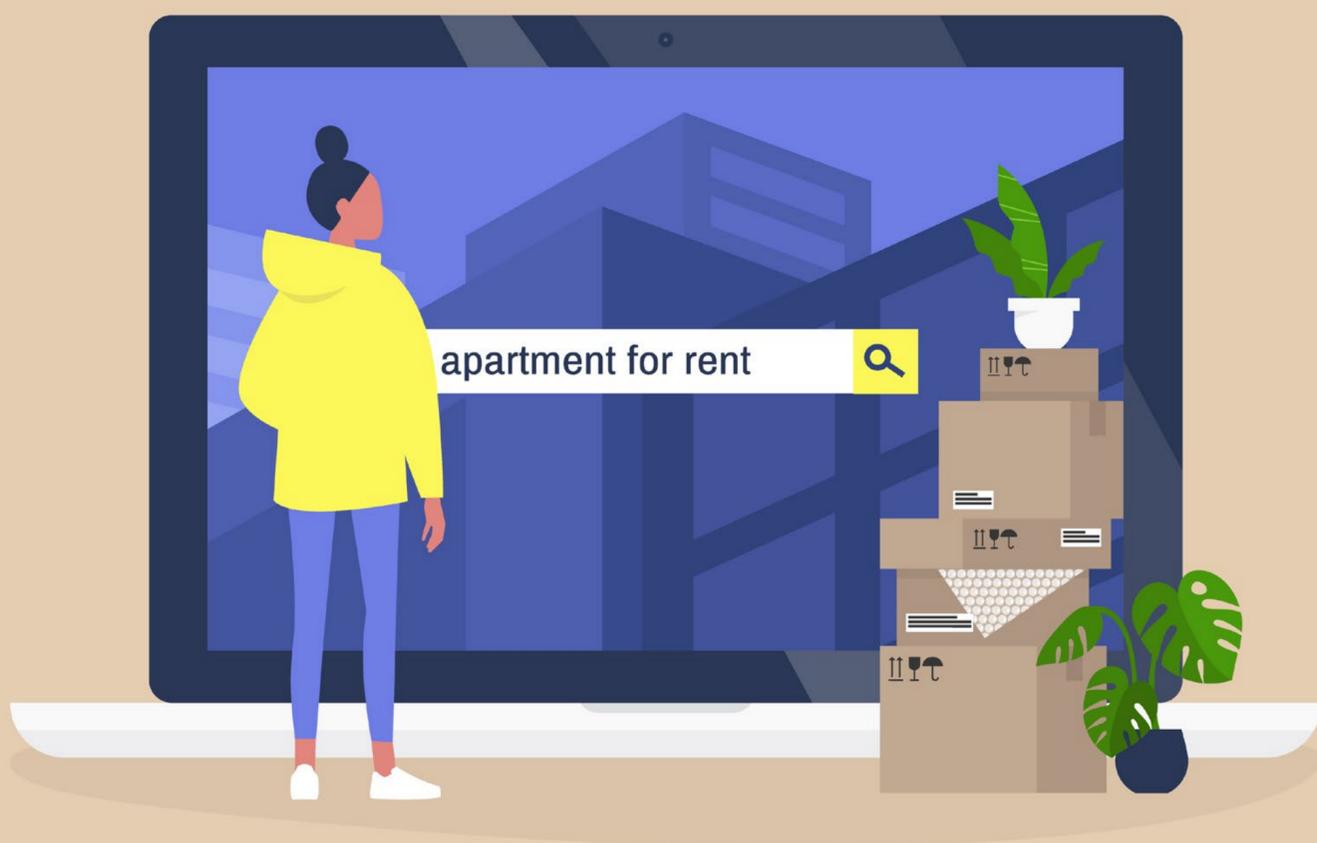
**Only with all of this information are you fully equipped to go out and house hunt!**

# Where to look & what

## to ask...

### Where to search?

**Student Homes by BCUSU** is a trusted option, and there are dedicated websites such as **Rightmove** and **Zoopla**.



### Who to trust?

Make sure that you use a landlord or agent that is accredited by a known accreditation scheme such as **MLAS (Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme)**. Do your research and find reviews where possible. If there are tenants there when you view the property, see what they have to say.

# Where to look & what to ask...

## What are the terms?

- Find out what steps you need to take to secure the property
- When do you need to sign the contract and pay a deposit?
- Make sure that your deposit is placed in a deposit protection scheme
- You may be charged administration fees, so find out what these are upfront

## Read contracts thoroughly.

The BCUSU Advice team are here to look over your tenancy agreement before you sign and agree to any terms or conditions.



# **Where to look & what to ask...**

## **Will any repair work/renovations be carried out?**

It may be that the landlord/agent has agreed to carry out certain things as part of the agreement, such as specific repair work or renovations.

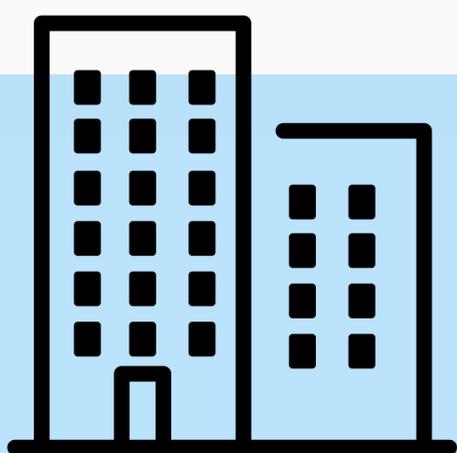
Make sure this is in writing and ask for written confirmation of the consequences of the work not being completed (such as cancelling the agreement or a refund of rent).

How will any repair work affect your tenancy? Will you be able to live in the property at the same time?

# Halls vs Homes

**Still not sure whether to choose student halls or a house?**

**Let us help you decide with some handy comparisons:**



## Halls Finance

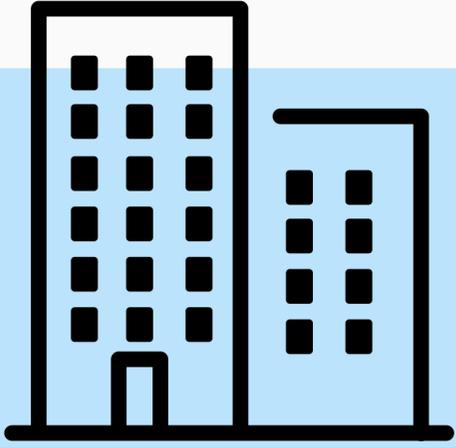
- Contract length could be anywhere from 41-51 weeks
- Utilities are often included in your rent
- There may be multiple payment plans available



## Homes Finance

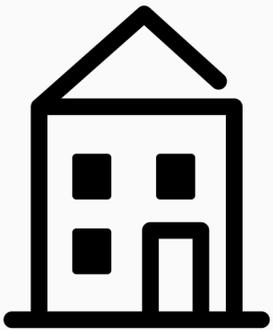
- Contract length will usually be around 51 or 52 weeks
- Usually organise your own utilities. Some landlords may offer an all-inclusive option but it will rarely be compulsory
- Landlord will often set the payment plan for rent options

# Halls vs Homes



## Halls Environment

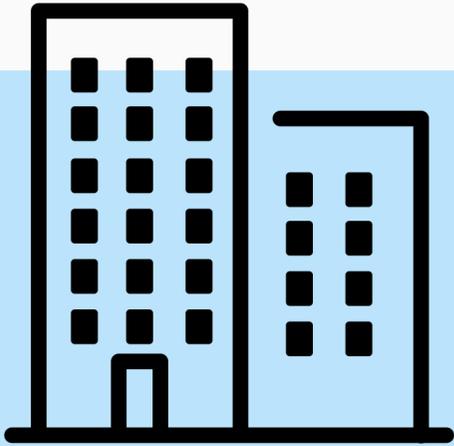
- Neighbours are likely to be students who are over 18
- Rubbish is put into a communal set of bins
- The accommodation will be managed by a company
- You may live with students on a similar schedule
- Halls may have its own security
- Halls will usually be in a busy area



## Homes Environment

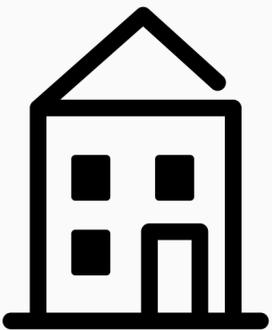
- Neighbours could be anyone, including families with young children
- A house will have bins you have to take out
- Managed by a company or an individual landlord
- Neighbours might have different schedules
- No private security, however local police may carry out patrols in your area
- If you don't live in the City Centre, you'll usually live in a local suburb community

# Halls vs Homes



## Halls Facilities

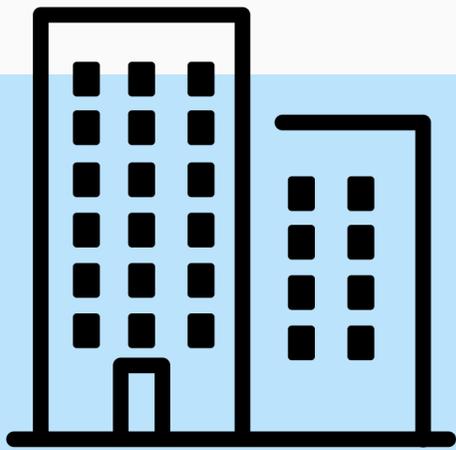
- Most halls are en-suite rooms
- You most likely won't have any outdoor space
- Your rent may include a gym within the building
- Rooms will most likely all look the same



## Homes Facilities

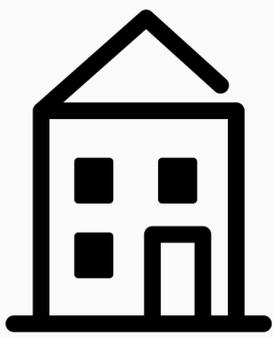
- Usually shared bathrooms
- May have outdoor space
- May be a local gym nearby
- Rooms will likely be different sizes

# Halls vs Homes



## Halls Pros & Cons

- + Shorter contract**
- + Student neighbours**
- + Security**
- + Facilities**
- + Inclusive bills**
- Usually more expensive
- Less privacy from staff
- Usually no outdoor space



## Homes Pros & Cons

- + Can usually move in over summer**
- + Local community**
- + More choice of room style**
- + Might have outdoor space**
- + More affordable usually**
- Non-student neighbours
- May have to set up own bills
- May have to travel further to university



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### Why Choose Hamcam private student village in Birmingham:

- Fantastic value for money with prices starting **from only £75.00 pppw**
- FREE student bus pass\* 2021/22 (worth at least £400), included in some offers
- Secure, gated community, In-house 24/7 security team, CCTV, on-site maintenance
- Zero tolerance of illegal substances and all of the people involved



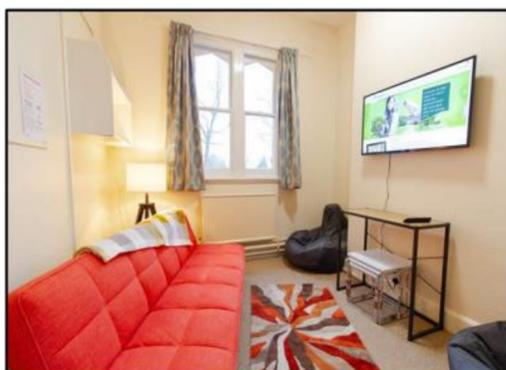
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 for the budget conscious independent student.

- ✓ Excellent value for money
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- ✓ Shorter contract lengths\*
- ✓ Student neighbours
- ✓ 24/7 in-house security

- ✓ Local community “home from home”
- ✓ Great choice of room style & budget
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- ✓ Bills included – no surprises

# Book online today: [www.ham-cam.com](http://www.ham-cam.com)

All this is included in your rent:



## **\*\*Extracts from 2020 Google reviews**

“Living at Ham Cam halls was definitely the best choice I made. It is a calm and safe place...I feel that I know much more of Birmingham...The security guards and the office staff are also nice and helpful!...The views and the place are beautiful...you are surrounded by nature”

“No place quite like it. Long live the bin” (the “bin” is the on-site private pub)

“very nice and helpful people. I lived there for 4 years”

“amazing value for money! The rent is very low ...and includes all bills, fast and reliable internet and even a bus pass! Lovely green and safe area. Loved it there!”

pppw = price per person per week

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Birmingham B20 1AP

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email [enquiries@ham-cam.com](mailto:enquiries@ham-cam.com)



hamcamstudentvillage



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# House Hunting Top 10

## 1 Check the house is secure

Most intruders get in through the windows; make sure that they are secure when closed. Also, check that the house has a working burglar alarm, for maximum security.

## 2 Get promises in writing

Make sure that anything agreed between you and the landlord is in writing or via email and signed by the landlord. Any agreements from scheduled repairs, an agreed day to pay rent, to extra furniture. Also agree on dates the agreements will be met and attach them to the back of the agreement before signing.

# House Hunting Top 10

## 3 Ask questions

The current tenants are a great indicator of what your potential property landlord will be like. Remember, it is you who has to live there so don't be afraid to ask questions about the landlord or property. E.g. 'Was the landlord prompt in sorting out questions and queries?'

## 4 Know your housemates

Living with friends can be one of the most exciting aspects of University life but choose housemates carefully! Think before you get tied into contracts. Suggest setting some ground rules, once you have decided who you're going to live with.

# House Hunting Top 10

## 5 Get the landlord's contact details

You'll need their full name, address and telephone number (home and mobile if you can). Put them somewhere safe - it may be worth putting them on your fridge as well as making sure that everyone in the house has the landlord's number.

## 6 Understand your contract

Make sure you understand what you are signing, as it is a legal document. If there is anything that you are unsure of, either ask the landlord/agent for clarification or show the contract to your Students' Union Advice team, after logging an initial enquiry.

# House Hunting Top 10

## 7 Ensure you'll get your deposit back

Legally, your deposit must be kept in a tenancy deposit scheme. In order to get your deposit back at the end, you need evidence! Take photographs of the condition of the property when you move in, and double check the inventory. Make sure to alert your landlord of any issues at the very beginning so that these can't be deducted from your deposit refund.

## 8 Get receipts

Get a receipt, no matter how minimal the amount you have paid is. Also, remember to keep your important documents altogether, in a safe place. Somewhere that it won't get mistaken for rubbish and thrown away.

# House Hunting Top 10

## 9 Make sure the house is safe

Slightly different to checking security. Ask for a copy of the gas safety certificate for gas appliances. Check for fire extinguishers and make sure the smoke detectors are in full working order.

## 10 Visit in the evening

Although safe during daytime, an area can completely change at night. Check out the property at night to make sure you feel safe.

# Housemates



Deciding who to live with is a big decision and not something you should rush into. If you're a first-year, you may have only known some of your friends for a few months, so deciding to live with them is a big decision to make!

It's important to remember that a tenancy agreement is a legally binding contract, and you'll be responsible for adhering to it for the length of the contract. You may decide that you don't want to enter into a shared house, but may prefer to live on your own.

**Find a flat mate!**

**Try the Students' Union's Room and Housemate Finder Facebook group >**

## **What are your priorities?**

Think about the things that you're looking for in your future housemates – is it someone who is tidy, fun, enjoys similar hobbies or is on the same course?



## **How much privacy do you need?**

It's important to consider your own boundaries and the boundaries of others. Are you somebody who prefers to keep your bedroom door closed, or are you looking for spontaneous visitors? How about your potential housemates?

## **Early bird or night owl?**

It's important to consider your routine, and the routines of your potential housemates. It's better to consider the practicality now, rather than living with a friend who you might not be compatible living with.



## **Do you all want the same thing?**

You might want something cheap but cheerful, but the people you're living with might want something a little more upmarket. It's better to be on the same page before you start looking. If you aren't looking for the same thing then you shouldn't feel forced to move into accommodation that you can't afford or won't feel comfortable in.

## **Relationships**

Are you in a relationship or is one of your potential housemates? This might mean that they won't be home as much, or that their partner is around for dinner a lot. If they stay frequently, would you want some contribution to the bills?

## **Non-students**

If any of your potential housemates aren't students, you'll have to pay council tax. Will they expect you to put in, or are they paying it? It's good to get this cleared up before you sign.

# What to do when you move in...

## **Take photos**

They may be needed to clear up any disputes in the future.

## **Check your inventory**

If the landlord does not give you an inventory, write your own (guidance available from [england.shelter.org.uk](http://england.shelter.org.uk)) and get an independent witness (i.e. a friend) to sign it.

## **Keys**

Make sure you have all the relevant keys you'll need for the property, for both the front and back doors, windows and garage (if applicable).

## **Neighbours**

It's always a good idea to introduce yourself to your new neighbours. Neighbours can be invaluable in keeping an eye on the property outside term time when you may not be around. It's also a good idea as they may be less likely to complain about noise, if you've made an effort to introduce yourselves to them.

## **Tenancy Deposit Protection (TDP)**

Check with your landlord that your deposit has been protected and what TDP scheme they have used. Your landlord should provide this information to you within 30 days of getting your deposit. If you think your landlord hasn't used a scheme when they should have, you can apply to a county court. If the court finds that your landlord hasn't protected your deposit, it can order them to either repay it to you or pay it into a TDP scheme within 14 days.

## **Sort your bills**

Find out which companies supply your gas, electricity and water and check your contract to find out if it is your responsibility to contact them to register yourselves as new tenants. It is always advisable to give the utility companies the names of all housemates, so that everyone is responsible for paying bills. If you wish to change energy provider, it is worth checking with your landlord/agent first. Check out [www.uswitch.com](http://www.uswitch.com), to see if another provider will work out cheaper.

## **Insurance**

It's always advisable to arrange contents insurance for your own belongings. You do not need to insure items that are already in the house and which are owned by your landlord.

## **Change of address**

Inform the University, your medical centre, friends and family of your new term time address. Register to vote at this new address, if you are a student with a term time and home address, you can be registered at both.

Register and find out more at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote).

## **Read your meters**

As soon as you move in, make sure you take a reading of your gas, electricity and water meters to ensure that you only pay for utilities you have used from the time you moved in. Your landlord/agent should make it clear where you will be able to find the meters, but if you aren't sure, don't be afraid to ask. Also, if you're unsure about which numbers to write down, it's better to make a note of everything you see on the meter and then the utility company will tell you what you need.

## Appliances

Make sure you know where the water stopcock, mains electricity, electricity switch, fuse box and gas isolator are located in case of an emergency. Ask your landlord to show you how the heating and hot water works, how the door and window locks work, where the fire alarms, smoke alarms, fire blankets and extinguishers are, and how each appliance works and whether there are relevant instruction booklets for them.

## Bins

Ask your landlord about the bin collection day so you can ensure that you put your rubbish out on the right day. Also make sure that you have the right amount of bins, especially if the local council operates recycling schemes and expects you to separate rubbish.

### A SECURITY MESSAGE FROM YOUR LOCAL POLICE



#### After you have moved in:

- Don't leave anything on display that is visible from outside!
- Don't forget to lock any gates to side alleyways!
- Don't forget to set your burglar alarm when you go out!
- Buy timer switches to use on radios and lights! This will make it appear that you are in when you are not and can be bought from most DIY or electrical shops
- Introduce yourself to your neighbours, especially if they are full time residents. They are more likely to look out for your property whilst you are away, and will get to know who should be visiting your house.

**POLICE EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBER: 999**  
**POLICE NON-EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBER: 101**

# Housing jargon

# driving you mad?

We understand that there is a lot of confusing terminology when renting a property, which is why we have put together a simple glossary to make it easier for you.

**Find the glossary here  
at [bcusu.com](https://bcusu.com) >**

# The Advice Centre by BCUSU

If you are not familiar with renting, or you just want to ask some questions, please speak to our advisors from the Advice Centre for some friendly, free and impartial advice before you commit to anything.

**You can contact us directly by:**

**[Logging an enquiry >](#)**

**We have a range of useful information available online:**

**[bcusu.com/advice >](https://bcusu.com/advice)**

## **We can advise you on the many aspects of renting, including;**

- Contracts
- Deposits
- Guarantors
- Fees
- Property condition
- Disrepair

The service also offers a contract review service where we can read through the contract for you before you sign and advise you on the contract terms and legal obligations, both you and the landlord have.

# House Hunting Checklist

## Paperwork

- Is the landlord accredited with MLAS?
- Is there a tenancy agreement?
- Do you understand the paperwork?
- Did you get a copy?

## Money

- How much is the rent and how is it payable?
- What does the rent include (Bills? How many weeks?)
- Does the landlord use a Tenancy Deposit Protection scheme? This is a legal requirement for Assured Short Hold Tenancies.

## Location

- Convenient to campus?
- Near a bus stop/train station?
- Near a supermarket, doctors, chemist?
- In an area familiar to students?

## Outside

- Does the house have a front/back garden?
- Do you know who is responsible for maintenance?

## Inside

- Any sign of damp?
- Enough furniture for all tenants?
- Fire safety logos on furniture/in good condition?
- Adequate space in kitchen for all tenants to store and prepare food?
- Any outstanding repairs/work to be done?

# House Hunting Checklist

## Gas, electricity & plumbing

- Plenty of electrical sockets?
- A current gas certificate?
- Hot and cold running water?
- Sufficient heating?

## Fire safety

- Smoke detectors in working order?
- Adequate means of escape?
- Can the front and back doors be opened from inside without a key?

## Security

- Does the property have a burglar alarm?
- Are there security locks on every window?

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on social media to hear our  
top tips, news, what's on  
and more...**



**SHARED STUDENT HOUSES AND FLATS  
WHICH ARE LOCATED WITHIN  
WALKING DISTANCE OF  
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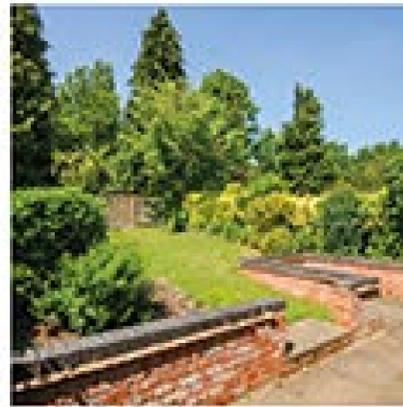
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- ▶ En-suites available

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Whatsapp available via our website.



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|  | Quiet study rooms    |  | Cycle stores |

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