

How to be a happy house hunter



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Welcome

Our guide aims to provide you with all the advice and information you need to find accommodation and have a safe and enjoyable experience living in the local community.

You can contact our Tenancy Support Team if you have any questions about living in the private sector or need any help or advice:

househunting@aru.ac.uk

Cambridge & Peterborough: +44 (0)1223 698900

Chelmsford: +44 (0)1245 683110

Opening hours: Monday–Friday, 9.30am–4.30pm

aru.ac.uk/privatesector

Things to think about before you start your search

Take your time

Choosing where you're going to live is a big decision that can impact on your finances, friendships and student experience. Tenancy agreements are legally binding, so it's important you don't rush into a decision.

If you're a current student looking for accommodation in the private sector for the next academic year we advise waiting until late February or March before you start looking. This gives you a chance to make strong friendship groups and allows landlords time to get their properties on the market, so you'll have more choice.

We hold house hunting events in March in Cambridge and Chelmsford. At our house hunting events, you'll be able to meet with local landlords, agents and private hall providers and pick up lots of useful information about renting in the private sector.

You can find out more, including the dates at: aru.ac.uk/privatesector

If you're new to the area, try to arrive with time to spare before your course starts to go on property viewings – it could take a couple of days to find the right thing for you. To take the pressure off your search, consider organising somewhere temporary to stay. You can find details of short stay accommodation and bed and breakfasts on our website: aru.ac.uk/shortstay

Which part of the city do you want to live in?

Remember that rent levels vary depending on different factors, such as distance from the city centre and public transport links. Do you want a convenient location for pubs, shops and the campus? Are there good public transport links? Can you get home safely?

Do you want specific facilities?

For example, a shower, bath, multiple bathrooms, bike storage, double glazing, separate living room and kitchen area?

Who do you want to live with?

Think carefully about who you want to live with. You might come to regret signing a contract with people who you've only known for a few weeks, and if you fall out before or after you move in, it's unlikely you'll be able to get out of the contract.

Spend some time getting to know your potential housemates and talk about what you all want out of your accommodation before you start house hunting. Sharing a house with people who have similar attitudes and lifestyles can make a big difference. It's also important to make sure that your lifestyle doesn't give neighbours cause for complaint. Don't forget, you're ambassadors for ARU.

Is the gender balance right?

Mixed gender houses generally work better.

Do all bedrooms have to be the same size?

If not, who will have the small rooms and will there be rent differences?

Do you all want the same?

Do you all want the same type of property?
Do you all want the same contract length period?

We'd never recommend signing a contract or paying any money before you have viewed the property. If a landlord or agent is pushing you for money before you've viewed the house it could be a scam.

Never sign anything until you are fully aware of your rights and responsibilities as a tenant.

What type of property?

Shared student houses involve students renting a room in a house and sharing the kitchen, communal areas and usually the bathroom. The size of the property and the number of other students you would share with varies.

Halls of Residence offer accommodation especially designed for students, typically offering en-suite bedrooms, social spaces and reception services.

Bedsits/studios are generally one room properties with the kitchen and bedroom in one room, and an ensuite bathroom. These are ideal for individuals wanting their own space. In bedsits, you may have to share the bathroom and toilet with other residents.

Self-contained flats normally have a separate living/kitchen area, bedroom and bathroom. These are suitable for individual lets or for couples.

Lodgings are where a room is rented in a house which is shared with the landlord and/or their close family. Generally the kitchen, bathroom and common areas are shared, although this can vary, along with any extra services provided. This can be a slightly cheaper option, but remember you will be living in someone else's home and living by their rules.

Where to look

StudentPad is our official property website, listing private sector accommodation in Cambridge, Chelmsford and Peterborough. The site is a great place to start your search as you'll find local shared student houses, halls of residence, studios/bedsits and self contained flats that are available to rent from private landlords and agents. There are usually a number of lodgings available too.

There's also a message board on StudentPad which allows students to post about available rooms in their rented house. This is great if you're searching on your own but want to live with others as you can chat with the other tenants before you move in. If you respond to an advert to take over someone else's tenancy, you, the existing tenant and the landlord should all sign paperwork to say the tenancy is now in your name.

There's also a housing advice section that has information on understanding contracts and your rights, along with tenancy deposit law.

You can access StudentPad at angliastudentpad.co.uk. It's available to all ARU students and applicants who have accepted a conditional or unconditional offer. You'll need a password to access StudentPad. Email househunting@aru.ac.uk with your Student ID number to be sent the password.

Be aware of scams. Never part with any money or sign any paperwork until you have seen the property. If something doesn't feel right, don't take it any further. We recommend you avoid using money transfer websites and always get proof of payment.

Other options

We strongly encourage you to use StudentPad as we have made sure that gas and electrical safety certificates and other legal requirements are in place. However, you may also find the following useful:

University notice boards often advertise accommodation. These may be from landlords or from students looking for people to share with.

Local newspapers will sometimes have accommodation listings. These newspapers are available from the local newsagents or online:

Cambridge News

cambridge-news.co.uk/news/property

Chelmsford Weekly News

chelmsfordweeklynews.co.uk/homes

Peterborough Telegraph

peterboroughtoday.co.uk/property

Lettings/Estate agents let accommodation on behalf of someone else.

Websites advertising house shares and lodgings can be found with a quick internet search. Not all sites are monitored so be wary of fake adverts and scams.
rightmove.co.uk/students
zoopla.co.uk
primelocation.com
accommodationforstudents.com

House hunting hints and tips

Individuals If you want to live on your own, then check Studentpad and agency listings for studios, one bedroom flats and bedsits. Many of the private halls of residence also have studio apartments. If you're happy to share a property, look for landlords who'll let rooms in a property individually, or check the StudentPad message board to see if any tenants are advertising a vacant room in their rented property.

Couples/two person groups Sometimes a landlord advertising a 'shared house for three' will let to two tenants at a negotiable rent; don't be afraid to ask them if they will consider this option. Alternatively you could consider booking a studio flat or taking two individual rooms or bedsits within one property.

Families Landlords advertising through StudentPad rarely let to families. If you're looking for family accommodation, you can get in touch with the Residential Service for advice. Contact details can be found on page 31 of this booklet.

Groups The most common number of bedrooms for student properties is four or five. It can be harder to find houses with six or more bedrooms, so you may need to compromise on other aspects of the property, or consider splitting into small groups.

Lodgings

If you're on a strict budget, you might want to look at lodgings. These can be cheaper and offer some flexibility on contract length. Remember you will be living in someone's home so try to get any house rules sorted, and in writing, before you move in. Some other things to consider:

Water use and laundry

- You should agree with your landlord how many baths/showers you can take and check if there are any restrictions on when you can use the bathroom.
- Laundry facilities may be offered, but sometimes at an extra charge.

Telephone

- You should ask for permission from the landlord to use the telephone for incoming or outgoing calls, and should check if the cost is included in your rent.
- A phone card or charge card could be cheaper when making outgoing calls.

Be courteous

- On occasions when you expect to be home late, it's helpful to let the landlord know in advance.
- Most landlords will allow visitors, but it's a good idea to introduce them to the landlord first.
- If you'd like to have an overnight guest, agree this with your landlord in advance.

It's important to respect your landlord's property and their privacy.





Arranging a viewing

Before the viewing

Have a think about what your property 'must-haves' are and keep these in mind when viewing. It's also a good idea to have a think about what you might be happy to compromise on if needed.

When you've seen an advert that interests you, contact the landlord and arrange a viewing. Remember to ask for the full address of the property as this will probably not be displayed on the advert for security reasons. All properties on StudentPad have a link to a map that will show you the location of the property, as well as a distance calculator to the university.

After making an appointment to view:

- Keep to the agreed time.
- If you're delayed, call the landlord to explain.
- If you're unable to attend a viewing always inform the landlord.
- Never call at a property unannounced, as this could disturb existing tenants.

Tip: For your personal safety, try not to view a property on your own. If it can't be avoided, make sure you let someone know where you're going.

Viewing a property

Go in the daytime so you can have a good look at the front and back streets and the

outside of the house. It's also a good idea to visit the area after dark with someone to make sure you feel comfortable in the area at night.

This property may be your home for the next 12 months so you need to make sure it's safe and secure. Remember to assess fire safety and security, as well as the quality of the furniture and fittings. All furniture and soft furnishings provided in rented properties must comply with fire safety regulations. Beds, mattresses, sofas, etc must all be fire retardant – it's advisable to check for labels to make sure these items are compliant.

A house in multiple occupation (HMO) should have mains wired smoke detectors, and carbon monoxide detectors if there are appliances that use gas, liquid or solid fuel like coal or wood (you can find out more about HMO's on page 12). Fire doors are also necessary in certain properties.

Take your time to look at each room, and try not to let the landlord rush you. Be prepared to ask the landlord questions – and expect adequate answers. If the current tenants are there, ask them about the property.

On the next page you'll find a property viewing checklist you may find useful, along with important questions to ask the landlord.

Inspection checklist

Below are some handy prompts of things to look out for and ask the landlord/agent during a viewing.

Outside the property

- ☐ Is there a garden? Who maintains it?
- ☐ Are the windows in good condition?
- ☐ Are the external doors in good condition?
- ☐ Is the roof in good condition? Are any slates or chimney pots missing?
- ☐ Are the gutters free of rubbish and vegetation?
- ☐ Are all drains running freely?
- ☐ Are there adequate facilities for refuse disposal and recycling?
- ☐ Is there bicycle storage?
- ☐ Do all the rooms have suitable curtains or blinds?
- ☐ Is there an intruder alarm system?
- ☐ Is there a fire alarm system?
- ☐ Is there a carbon monoxide detector?
- ☐ Are there any fire extinguishers in the property?
- ☐ Is there a fire blanket in the kitchen?
- ☐ Are there means of escape in the event of fire?
- ☐ If there is a fireplace, has it recently been swept?

Security and safety

- ☐ Are all external doors solid and secure?
- ☐ Does the front door have a viewing panel or spy hole?
- ☐ Do all ground floor windows have locks?
- ☐ Does the front door have a five-lever mortice lock?
- ☐ If the front door has glazing, is the glass wired, reinforced or double glazed?
- ☐ Are any windows broken or cracked?

Furniture and fittings

- ☐ Do all the rooms have a bed, desk, wardrobe and suitable floor coverings?
- ☐ Does all the furniture comply with regulations on fire safety?
- ☐ Does all the furniture (that you see) come with the property?
- ☐ Are there enough kitchen cupboards for everyone?
- ☐ Is all the furniture in good repair? Does any need replacing?

- ☐ Are there enough chairs for residents to eat a meal together?
- ☐ Are the cooker, grill and oven in working order?
- ☐ Is the fridge and freezer in good condition with enough shelving space?
- ☐ Are there television aerial points in all rooms?
- ☐ Is there a connection point for telephones and the Internet?

Plumbing

- ☐ Is the bathroom in good condition?
- ☐ Are there enough bathrooms/toilets?
- ☐ Is there a shower?
- ☐ Are any of the fittings dripping or is there any evidence of leaks?
- ☐ Is the water pressure high enough?
- ☐ Does the hot water get hot enough?
- ☐ Do all the taps work and does the toilet flush?
- ☐ How does the hot water work (consider costs)?

Electricity and gas

- ☐ Does the heating cover all areas of the house, and does it work?
- ☐ Do all of the rooms have adequate electrical sockets that work?
- ☐ How does the heating work (consider costs)?
- ☐ Will there be adequate heating for the winter?
- ☐ Do the extractor fans in the kitchen and bathroom work?
- ☐ Have you seen the current year's gas safety certificate (completed by a Gas Safety Register engineer)?
- ☐ When were the electrics last safety checked?
- ☐ Can the landlord evidence this?
- ☐ Have appliances been Portable Appliance Tested (PAT)?

After the viewing

Choosing your accommodation is a big decision, so take time to consider all your options. Tenancy agreements are legally binding and you can't usually be released once you've signed one. Talk things through with people you'll be sharing with and ask to re-visit the property if you wish to.

Get your documents ready

Before you can sign a tenancy, landlords must conduct Right to Rent checks to make sure that you can legally rent a property. So make sure you have documents such as your passport and visa ready for checking. They may also need to do a credit check and ask for evidence of your employment or student status.

Make sure the property is safe

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

Properties that are occupied by 2 or more unrelated people are known as HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation). Landlords or agents managing a property lived in by five or more unrelated people are legally required to get a licence from the local council. This is to ensure the property is safe and properly managed.

A list of properties that have been issued a HMO licence is available on each local council's website so you can find out which HMOs are licensed and who manages them. This should help you find good quality accommodation.

Gas Safe Register Carbon monoxide from gas appliances kills on average 40 people a year in England and Wales. Make sure you have seen the Gas Safety Certificate for the property. Landlords are required, by law, to provide you with a copy of these when, or before, you move in. They should also make sure a registered engineer inspects the appliances annually.

Energy Performance Certificate If the landlord does not live in the property they must also give you a copy of the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). The certificate is valid for 10 years from the issue date. The EPC grades the building's energy and carbon emission efficiency from 'A' to 'G'. 'A' is the most efficient. It is illegal for a landlord with a property who's energy rating is lower than E to rent out their property.

Electrical safety Your landlord needs to ensure that the electrical installation and all electrical appliances are safe with little risk to you as tenants. Make sure the landlord has plans for periodic inspections and testing of the electrics in place. If the property is a HMO the mains installation must be inspected every five years. Ask to see the property's Electrical Installation Condition Report which will prove this.

Other

If your landlord isn't living in the same property they must also provide you with a copy of the Government's 'How to Rent' guide and the details of their chosen Deposit Protection Scheme (more on page 16).

Understanding costs

Before you sign a tenancy, make sure the property will be affordable. Seek budgeting advice either online or via ARU's Money Advice Team. There may be other costs on top of the rent you hadn't considered, although these are now tightly regulated following the introduction of the Tenant Fees Act.

Rent

- How much is the rent?
- Does it vary between different rooms in the house? Is this clearly documented?
- Are any bills included in the rent (gas, water, electricity, tv licence, internet, or telephone?) How much are they likely to be?
- When and how is the rent payable?
- Does the weekly rate of the rent stay the same throughout the tenancy, even if the installments aren't equal?

Check that you're not being overcharged for rent by comparing rental costs with other similar properties in the area. Ensure you know how often the rent is due and the amount to be paid. Rent is normally paid in advance and may be due weekly or monthly. You're expected to pay the full amount due, without the landlord having to ask for it.

It's a good idea to ask for a receipt when you've made a payment in case you need to refer to it later. It should detail the date the payment was made, the amount paid, and the time period it covers. If you're paying by direct debit, always keep copies of your bank statements proving that the right amount has been paid.

Retainer rent This is a charge you may be asked to pay if you are staying in lodgings and wish to return to the same place after

a University closure period. If such a rent is chargeable, agree this with the landlord before you move in.

Bills

If utilities (gas, water, electricity) aren't included, allow £10-12 per week. Don't forget to budget for extras like telephone and internet! If possible, ask the landlord or previous tenants about the utility costs.

Television licence If you or your housemates have a TV or stream/download BBC iPlayer content on a mobile or other device, you'll need a TV licence. One licence may cover multiple devices in a shared house, depending on your tenancy agreement. You can visit tvlicensing.co.uk for more information.

Insurance The landlord's insurance won't normally cover your personal belongings for loss or theft, so you should make your own arrangements. Look around to find the best insurance package for you. The Students' Union and the Residential Service office may have further information. You may also be able to get cover under your parents' contents insurance.

Council Tax If you move in to a property where all rooms are occupied by full time, registered students you won't have to pay Council Tax. Your landlord may ask you to provide a Council Tax Exemption Certificate which can be requested from our iCentre. If anybody living in a shared house is not a student, the property may become liable for Council Tax. You might also need to start paying Council Tax if your accommodation contract is longer than the course dates stated on your exemption certificate.



Understanding deposits

Landlords will normally ask for some money before you move in to a property. The amount will vary, but there are strict laws about what landlords can charge. Make sure you know exactly how much you'll need to pay and what it's for. Understand when it's payable, if it's refundable and if there are any reasons why the landlord could be entitled to keep some or all of the money.

Damage deposits are returned at the end of the tenancy. If you cause any damage to the property or have rent arrears or outstanding bills when you move out, then the landlord may be entitled to keep some or all of this deposit. If the landlord does keep some of the deposit they must fully explain why.

Unless the total rent for the property will be more than £50,000 a year, you can't be charged more than 5 week's rent as a damage deposit.

All deposits taken by landlords for Assured Shorthold Tenancies (more information on contract types on Page 16), must be protected under a Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme. You should ask your landlord about the details of the scheme before signing any agreements or making a payment. The landlord is required to provide details about how your deposit is protected within 30 days of receiving your deposit.

Tenancy Deposit Protection is designed to make sure:

- You get a decision as to how much of your deposit is going to be returned within 10 days from the end of your tenancy. Any part of the deposit kept back after this date will remain protected until the dispute is resolved. The exact arrangements depend on the type of scheme used.
- Landlords who don't protect tenancy deposits may have to pay their tenant back up to three times the amount of the original deposit.

For further advice on resolving disputes you can visit: gov.uk/tenancy-deposit-protection/disputes-and-problems

If you have a Licence Agreement your landlord is not legally required to protect your deposit in a Government backed scheme. If a return of deposit is disputed, you may have to seek specialist advice.

Holding deposits are capped at 1 week's rent and are usually a non-refundable sum paid to the landlord to hold the property for you. Generally once you've paid a holding deposit, the landlord shouldn't show the property or offer it to anyone else. You should only pay a holding deposit if you are fairly sure you want the property. If you change your mind, you won't get your holding deposit back.

Unless you agree something different with your landlord, they can only keep the holding deposit for 15 days, and it must be refunded to you within a further 7 days of this date if no tenancy agreement is entered into. Landlords can only keep the holding deposit if you change your mind, fail a Right to Rent check or provide false or misleading information.

If you enter into a tenancy agreement, the holding deposit may either be returned to you, or can become part of your first rent installment or the damage deposit if you and the landlord agree to this.

Check your holding deposit agreement carefully. In some cases, it could actually commit you to taking the property even before you have signed a tenancy agreement.

Advanced rent

Some landlords may charge you 'advanced rent' instead of a deposit – this money will be deducted from your first rent payment once the tenancy has begun. This is a permitted payment according to the Tenant Fees Act 2019. There isn't a cap on the amount they can ask, but all rent installments need to equate to the same weekly rate throughout the tenancy, so make sure the landlord isn't hiding any banned fees within any rent payments.

Whichever type of deposit you pay, you should always get a receipt which states the amount paid and whether it is a returnable deposit. Keep the receipt safe as you may need to refer to it at a later date.

Understanding contracts

Many of the terms in a written agreement for accommodation are laid down in law. Make sure you fully understand all the terms before you sign the agreement. Once you've signed, you are bound by the terms for the full length of your tenancy. If necessary, request to take a copy away and seek professional advice.

Make sure the contracts include the following and that you understand and agree with them:

- the start date of the tenancy
- the end date of the tenancy
- the amount of rent
- if the rent varies between different rooms, make sure this is clearly documented
- the dates on which rent should be paid
- any terms which deal with reviewing the rent
- deposit details
- responsibilities and expectations of tenants
- responsibilities and expectations of the landlord
- notice period and how this can be given (by both landlord and tenant).

If any improvement works are going to be carried out before the start of the agreement, make sure that details of the work are added to the contract along with confirmation that it will be finished before you move in.

Below is a brief summary of the different types of contracts you might come across. For a more detailed description we would recommend you read the guide: Assured Shorthold Tenancies – a Guide for Tenants. You can find a link to this booklet online at aru.ac.uk/privatesector

Types of contract

Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST)

You'll find that the majority of properties are let under this type of contract, which can be made for a specific 'fixed' period of time; one academic year, for example. You normally won't find one for a period of less than six months. You can't give notice to leave early during the period of the contract, unless there is a break clause in your contract. Once the fixed term has ended, AST's normally become Assured Periodic Tenancies. This means they continue on a weekly or monthly basis until you, or the landlord, give notice.

Joint Assured Shorthold Tenancies

Most students have joint tenancy agreements which means that all the tenants sign the same contract rather than having separate agreements with the landlord. A joint tenancy means that each tenant is 'jointly and severally' liable for the rent of the full property, as well as the bills, deposits and any other charges. If any tenants leave before the end of the fixed term, the remaining tenants will be liable for the ongoing rent if the former tenant doesn't pay.

Individual Assured Shorthold Tenancies

This means that you're only liable for the rent for your room but have a joint right of access to all the shared facilities of the property (i.e. bathroom, kitchen etc).

Licence Agreements This type of contract occurs where a landlord agrees to provide an extra service that requires them, (or a nominated person) unrestricted access to your room. This might include things like a cleaning service, rubbish removal or linen changes. Licence agreements are common if you reside in lodgings.

Excluded Occupier If you share accommodation with your landlord, either in their home as a lodger, or in a converted property where you and the landlord live in different parts of the building, you will be an excluded occupier. On these types of contract your rights are reduced.

Verbal Agreements These are not recommended because without a written record it can be very difficult to determine what has been agreed if disputes arise at a later date. A verbal agreement can be legally binding. Make sure all details are discussed thoroughly at the beginning of the tenancy. This will need to include rent amounts and payments, tenancy dates, terms and conditions, deposits, responsibility for bills etc.

Permitted payments

The Tenant Fees Act has tightened up on charges that landlords can request during your tenancy so read it carefully. The landlord cannot 'fine' you or make a profit, they can only request to be reimbursed for any losses. They can also only charge you for breaking a clause that is clearly stated in your tenancy agreement.

Permitted payments are:

- up to £50 to amend the tenancy
- early termination fees (to cover losses only)
- default payments for late payment of rent (capped at 3% over the Bank of England interest rate and not to be demanded until the payment is 14+ days late)
- costs incurred as a result of you breaching the tenancy (losing a key, damage to building/contents etc.) This is capped at the cost of the loss the landlord incurred, so you should request proof of how much the item/works cost.



Understanding credit checks

Credit checks and references Landlords want to check that you're going to be a good tenant. This may involve a credit check on your past finances, and a reference from a previous landlord. It is illegal for agents and landlords to charge you for these checks.

If you're moving out of university managed accommodation, we can provide a reference if you've been a good tenant, you have no outstanding rent and your rent was paid on time.

Guarantors If you pay rent in installments a landlord will probably ask for a guarantor. This normally has to be someone based in the UK who earns above a certain wage and/or who owns their own property. Guarantors could be your parents, a family member, friend or guardian who would be

prepared to pay your rent if you don't. They will need to sign a guarantee document that should state that the agreement will only last for a set period of time and, if possible, should set a limit on how much the guarantor can be asked to pay. If you've signed a joint contract you should also try to agree that the guarantor will only have to cover the rent for their named person rather than for the whole household.

If you're not able to offer a UK-based guarantor, you may be asked to pay a higher amount of rent in advance, or be able to use a company to act as a guarantor. **Please contact the Residential Service for advice if you are struggling to secure a property.**

Moving in

Inventory Your landlord should provide you with an inventory which lists the items/furniture provided in the property. This is so that everyone can agree on the condition and contents of the accommodation at the start of the tenancy. If your landlord doesn't provide one, request one or make one yourself. Record all the furniture and log its condition, record all marks on walls, doors, windows and worn spots on the carpets etc.

Taking photographs and video footage of every room on the day you move in is also a good idea as it will support your inventory and visually record the condition of the property. Ideally use a camera which records a time and date so you can prove when the photos were taken.

You and the landlord will have to agree on the inventory to make it valid, but having an agreed inventory, and evidence to support it, could save you issues with tenancy deposit disputes when you move out.

If you have any concerns about the property when you move in, report them to the landlord straight away. It's always a good idea to follow up any verbal requests with an email or letter so that you have a record of the request. Make sure you state clearly what the problem is and ask the landlord to confirm receipt of the request and when it will be dealt with.

Registering with utility companies

If you're moving in to a property where bills aren't included you'll need to arrange for the supply of water, electricity, gas and telephone/internet to be transferred into your names. It's a good idea to register all your names with each utilities company. This makes sure that all of you are responsible and should a late payment be made, you'll all be held accountable for it. There are also 'bill sharing' companies who may be able to help you and your flatmates pay your bills more simply. These companies don't usually charge for the service, but bear in mind you won't have the same choice of utility companies as they tend to have arrangements with certain providers. If you're unsure about managing your bills, just ask your landlord or the Residential Service.

On the first day of your tenancy, take the gas, electricity and water meter readings and write them down. When you register with the relevant company you'll need to give them your initial reading. This will make sure that you don't end up paying for any gas, electricity or water used by the previous tenants.

Security Student occupied properties can be more vulnerable to burglary, so security should be a priority. Make sure doors and windows are secured when no one is in and consider leaving a low energy light on.

If you leave the property for Christmas or Easter, take computers and other valuables with you, and consider setting a light on a timer.

Remember to insure your personal belongings, and register your belongings on the 'Immobilise' website
immobilise.com

You can find further information on security and crime reports on areas by visiting:
www.police.uk



Understanding obligations

We want you to have a positive experience living in the private rented sector. To help make sure this happens, you need to understand who is responsible for what.

Landlord responsibilities:

- To keep the structure and exterior of the house, including drains, gutters, and external pipes in good repair.
- To keep the installations for the supply of water, gas, electricity, sanitation (including basins, sinks, baths and toilets), and installations for heating rooms and heating water in good repair and proper working order.
- To undertake non-urgent repairs within 28 days. Urgent repairs such as plumbing or sanitation should be completed within one or two days. If the fault is not corrected within a reasonable period of time (dependant upon the nature of the disrepair) then seek advice from the Residential Service or the Council's Housing Advice Team.
- To provide a rent book if the rent is paid weekly.
- To provide you with the landlord's full name and address.
- To provide you with a copy of a valid current Gas Safety Certificate and (depending on the type of tenancy) other legally required documents including the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC), "How to Rent" guide and details of the Deposit Protection Scheme used.
- To allow you to 'peacefully enjoy' your accommodation.
- Landlords have the right to enter the property at reasonable times to carry out repairs and to inspect the condition and state of repair of the property. They must give at least 24 hours notice in writing if they wish to enter the property to do this. To avoid any confusion, try to have details of how to report repairs and arrangements for access included in the Tenancy Agreement.

Your responsibilities:

- To fulfil your responsibilities as stated in your agreement.
- To act in a 'tenant-like manner'. This means you should perform the smaller tasks around the house such as replacing lightbulbs, unblocking the sink when clogged with waste, and cleaning the downstairs windows when necessary.

- To secure the property when you go out
 - lock all the doors and windows.
- If you're allowed to bring your own furniture into the property, make proper arrangements to store the owner's furniture somewhere where it will not be damaged. Be aware that you're potentially liable if you bring items into the house which do not comply with current safety legislation.
- Always report any repairs you need in writing immediately. Keep a copy in case you need to refer to it later.
- Clean the house properly on a regular basis.
- If you break or damage anything (deliberately or accidentally) inform the landlord immediately.



Community Living

One of the best things about renting privately is that you can discover a new part of the city.

Check out local independent shops and cafes, search online for events happening in your area and look out for volunteering opportunities - there'll be lots of things happening that you'll be sorry to miss!

Getting on with the neighbours

When you first move in, pop round and introduce yourself to your neighbours - it will make everyone feel more comfortable about talking over any issues that arise if you know names and faces.

People who see a regular changeover of student tenants can get nervous that this year will be 'the year they have bad neighbours' - put their mind at rest immediately by having a chat - plus it's always nice to know who you're living next door to.

Rubbish

A quick way to annoy your neighbours is letting your bins overflow or leaving bins out on the street long after collection day. You can find out your bin collection day on the local council's website:

cambridge.gov.uk/bins-rubbish-and-recycling

chelmsford.gov.uk/bins-and-recycling

Bins should be put out after 6pm the day before they're due to be collected and brought in again by 8am the day after they've been emptied.

Parking around the city

Students aren't supposed to bring cars to Uni, and can face disciplinary action if reported. If you choose to bring a car, please park it responsibly by not blocking driveways, respecting the parking restrictions and obviously follow the normal rules of the road such as not parking on double yellow lines. If the property you're renting has a garage or driveway, check your tenancy agreement or with the landlord about whether you're allowed to use this.

If you're being bothered by your neighbours

You can report any issues with your neighbours to the local council's environmental health team - things such as excessive noise, problems with bins or pests can all be reported. Just because you are only renting a property for a year doesn't give you any fewer rights than permanent residents. Come and talk to the Residential Service if you need any advice.

Moving out

As you get to the end of your tenancy there are several things you'll need to make sure you get sorted, especially if you want to be in with the best chance of getting your full deposit back.

- Arrange an end of tenancy visit by the landlord to inspect the property. Agree any deposit deductions with the landlord.
- If you pay your own bills, contact the utility companies (gas, electricity, water and telephone) and arrange for final readings to be taken.
- Cancel the television licence.
- Remember to arrange for your mail to be redirected to your next address. You can arrange this online or at the post office for a fee.
- Always allow plenty of time to clean the house at the end of a tenancy and avoid having a party in the last few days.
- Make sure that everyone does their fair share of the cleaning before they leave.
- Return the keys of the property to the landlord on the day you move out.

Please remember:

- You'll be in breach of your contract if you deduct your deposit from the last month's rent.
- If you have a Joint Tenancy Agreement and leave a few weeks early, your deposit will not be repaid immediately. You'll have to wait until the official end of your contract and allow time for inspection of the property and administration processes.

Other things to consider:

- Has all the rent been paid?
- Have all the bills been paid?
- Are there any 'reasonable' damage or cleaning charges that the landlord could make?
- Have all the other conditions of the Tenancy Agreement been met?
- Has a letter been sent to the landlord or deposit scheme administrator requesting the return of the deposit?



What to do if things go wrong

Harassment and unlawful eviction

If your landlord wants you to leave the house then there is a legal process that they must follow before you can be evicted. This will include a written notice and possibly applying to the court for a possession order.

If you're evicted without the landlord following the correct procedure then the landlord is committing a criminal offence.

Whilst living in rented accommodation you are also entitled to 'quiet enjoyment' of the property. This means that the landlord should not unreasonably disturb you. If the landlord (or someone acting on their behalf) keeps stopping by for unannounced visits, frequently does not fulfill their responsibilities for basic repairs, disconnects utility supplies, etc. then this may amount to harassment which is also a criminal offence.

If you're in danger of eviction or suffering from harassment by your landlord then contact the Residential Service or your local Council's Housing Aid or Advice Centre as soon as possible.

You can find out more about your rights when it comes to eviction, harassment and other legal housing issues on the Citizens Advice Bureau's website and from the housing charity, Shelter (contact details on page 31).

Housemate disputes There's no set rules for how to deal with disputes between housemates as the type of problems that come up can vary. The most important thing is to use your common sense and be willing to communicate with your housemates. Try

speaking to the person, explain your side and listen to their position. If you can't resolve the matter, you could contact the landlord who may agree to help.

Alternatively, you could find a mutually agreeable third party who could act as a mediator and attempt to solve the problem. If you think your housemate is committing an illegal act, don't hesitate to contact the police – it could save you a lot of hassle in the long run.

If you've signed a contract, simply packing your bags and leaving may not be an option. You may remain liable for paying the rent for as long as your name remains on the contract, even if you're no longer living in the property, so if you're unsure please seek advice.

Lack of maintenance and repair Always seek advice if a landlord fails to make a repair. Don't withhold rent, this is a serious breach of contract and could put you at risk of eviction. If you have suffered financial loss, inconvenience, or damage to your property because of disrepair, you may have a case to claim a partial rent refund from the landlord. This could include things like losing cooking facilities or the hot water supply for more than a day, or having to move out of your bedroom. You should discuss this situation with your landlord first and state clearly in writing why you feel compensation is warranted.

If you can't reach an agreement and are thinking of deducting money from your rent, make sure you seek advice. If the landlord disagrees with you they could take money from your deposit and/or take action in the county court to recover any shortfall in rent.

FAQs

Here's a few of the most common questions you've been asking us, and our answers:

1. Will all the best houses go first?

Unless you are looking for family accommodation or properties with more than 6 bedrooms, there will likely be plenty of good quality options for you – no matter what the Lettings Agents say!

2. When should I start house hunting?

We think February/March time is the best time, which is why we launch our House Hunting season then. But there's no harm in getting prepared before then – start by figuring out how much rent you can afford, where you want to live and who you want to live with. Also consider anything you're willing to compromise on. It's a good idea to talk to family/friends about whether they would be willing to be a guarantor for you and also to start saving up for the deposit and first month's rent so you are in a good position to sign up for a place when you've found 'the one'.

3. Can I get my contract checked?

A tenancy agreement is a legally binding document and you should make sure you fully understand it all before you sign it or pay any money. Tenancy agreements are also notoriously long and confusing! Have a good read through and our Tenancy Support Team will be happy

to look at any terms in a contract you might be unsure about, although we aren't legally trained so you may wish to get the contract checked by the local Citizens Advice Bureau too.

4. Should I pay anything before I sign?

Never pay any money before you've at least read a draft copy of the housing contract – you can't know if you want the property if you don't know the terms of the agreement. You might get asked to pay a 'holding deposit' before you sign an agreement and this is fine, so long as the amount doesn't exceed 1 week's rent, and you know the circumstances in which you wouldn't get the money refunded. It's now illegal for letting agents and landlords to charge 'admin fees' or to make you pay for things like referencing or credit checks. Don't pay things like damage deposits or advanced rent until you're happy with the tenancy agreement.

5. What can I do if I am feeling overwhelmed about finding somewhere to live?

Come and talk to the Tenancy Support Team! Our contact details are on page 31 of this guide. It's best to make an appointment as we aren't always in the office.

Further help and advice

You're welcome to contact the Tenancy Support Team in the Residential Service for help and advice on private accommodation issues. You can also find lots of information on our website aru.ac.uk/privatesector

Tenancy Support Team:
househunting@aru.ac.uk
Cambridge & Peterborough: +44 (0)1223 698900
Chelmsford: +44 (0)1245 683110
Opening hours: Monday–Friday, 9.30am–4.30pm
aru.ac.uk/privatesector

For more serious issues involving housing or tenancy law, it's advisable to seek legal advice. The Citizens Advice Bureau and local council Housing Advice Centres both offer a free advice legal service, or you may prefer to contact a specialist solicitor.

Cambridge Advice Centres

Cambridge Housing Advice Centre

Cambridge City Council
Mandela House
4 Regent Street
Cambridge CB2 1BY
T: 01223 457918
cambridge.gov.uk/get-advice-about-housing

Citizens Advice Bureau

66 Devonshire Road
Cambridge CB1 2BL
T: 08082 787808
cambridgecab.org

Chelmsford Advice Centres

Housing Aid Centre

Chelmsford Borough
Council
Civic Centre, Duke Street
Chelmsford CM1 1JE
T: 01245 606400
chelmsford.gov.uk/housing/

Citizens Advice Bureau

Burgess Well House
Coval Lane
Chelmsford, CM1 1FW
T: 0800 144 88 48
chelmsfordcab.org

Peterborough Advice Centres

Housing Aid Centre

Peterborough City Council
Town Hall
Bridge Street
Peterborough PE1 1HF
T: 01733 864064
peterborough.gov.uk/residents/housing/housing-advice

Citizens Advice Bureau

T: 0808 278 7850
citapeterborough.org.uk

Any
questions?
Please ask

Visit: aru.ac.uk/privatesector

Email: househunting@aru.ac.uk

Call: Cambridge & Peterborough: +44 (0)1223 698900

Chelmsford: +44 (0)1245 683110