

International Students House Hunting Guide.

Essential checklist

To complete before you agree to rent

Before you look for a property, make a list of what is important to you. If you move in and discover it is too cold or the bedroom is too small you can not move out because you have signed a contract and still have to pay the rent. The following checklist covers the basic things you need to consider. Use it with your list of what you want so you are not disappointed when you move in.

Property checklist

Name of landlord:

Address:

Rent per week:

What to consider

- Size of rooms
- Would you be happy with the bedroom? (Think about studying space with a good desk and comfortable chair)
- Does the kitchen have enough equipment and space for you all to prepare and store food?
- Are there enough bathrooms?
- Is there enough natural light in your room?
- Is there a 'social space' to meet others? (How would you feel if you are in your bedroom all the time?)

Make sure you look at different properties with different landlords. This will let you compare properties and help you make a decision. Use this checklist to compare different properties and the scores you give them. Further copies of the checklist and information on the code of standards can be found at www.luuuonline.com/help

Your comments

Tick or cross box as appropriate

Location?

How long will it take to get to university? (check the bus times)
 Short Average Long

How much will a weekly ticket to university be?
 Cheap Average Expensive

Will the cheaper rent make up for the bus fare?
 Yes No

Do you know any friends living in the same area?
 Lots Some None

Are there any local shops?
 Plenty A few None

Would you feel safe in the area? (especially at night)
 Safe Average Unsafe

Cost?

Do you know what the weekly rent is?
 Yes Unsure No

Do you know when the rent payments are? (e.g. monthly/three monthly)
 Yes Unsure No

Can you afford to pay it all yourself?
 Yes Unsure No

Do you have to pay the bills? (e.g. gas/electricity/water)
 Yes Unsure No

Can you afford the deposit?
 Yes Unsure No

Furniture?

Are you happy with the condition?
 Yes Unsure No

If not will the landlord replace any of it?
 Yes Unsure No

Is there enough furniture in your room?
 Yes Unsure No

Do you have a desk and chair for studying?
 Yes Unsure No

Are there enough chairs for the dining table?
 Yes Unsure No

Heating?

Is there central heating in the property?
 Yes Unsure No

Is there central heating in your room? (test the heating to make sure it works)
 Yes Unsure No

Are the radiators big enough for the rooms? (think about the cold winter)
 Yes Unsure No

Condition?

Are there any repairs that need doing?
 Yes Unsure No

Are there any signs of damp patches?
 Yes Unsure No

Would you be happy with the décor and carpets?
 Yes Unsure No

Does the heating boiler look quite new? A new boiler is more reliable and cheaper to run.
 Yes Unsure No

Security?

Is there a burglar alarm that works?
 Yes Unsure No

Do ground floor windows have locks?
 Yes Unsure No

Are the outside doors strong?
 Yes Unsure No

Would you feel safe in the property?
 Yes Unsure No

Landlord?

Has the landlord asked you to pay to have the contract checked?
 Yes Unsure No

Has the landlord signed up to a code of standards?
 Yes Unsure No

Do you think the landlord is treating you well?
 Yes Unsure No

Disabled students:

if you would like this information in larger type or printed on a different coloured paper, or if you need the information in another format, please contact the

Student Advice Centre on

(0113) 3801 300

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What you should do.

It is important to do what the contract says and don't end up paying more money than you need to.

Before you sign a contract

You should:

- Get the contract checked at the Student Advice Centre.
- While you are there check that the landlord is on the list of Unipol or Leeds City Council Code of Standards. This means they will probably be a reasonable landlord and will mean you have more help if they are not.

- Ask the landlord or agent which Tenancy Deposit Scheme they are going to use. By law they have to protect your deposit by using a government scheme. To find out how this works go to www.luuonline.com/help and look at housing. You can also read [www.direct.gov.uk/tenancy deposit](http://www.direct.gov.uk/tenancy_deposit). Contact the Student Advice Centre if you have problems.

- Make sure you are happy with the people you will be living with.

- Make sure the property contains everything you need - use the checklist on www.luuonline.com.

- Check that the property is in good condition. If any big repairs are needed or it has damp, don't take it.

- Make sure all extra agreements for improvements or rent reductions are written into the contract.

- Speak to the current tenants and see what they think of the landlord.

Once you sign a contract it is too late to make changes, cancel the contract or get your deposit back if you change your mind.

What you have to pay

Make sure you:

- Work out how much money you can afford to pay for the whole year including your rent and deposit. Remember to add money for bills.

- Ask the current tenants how much their utility bills are (these can be over £10 per week).

- Know whether you have enough sponsorship money or savings to pay what you will owe on the contract.

- Get a television licence (which costs £131.50). It is a criminal offence not to have one and you could be fined over £1,000.

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Moving in

You must:

- Take photos if anything is broken or damaged.

- Write to or ring utility companies with names of all tenants and tell them the dates you are moving in and out.

- Tell the landlord in writing as soon as anything stops working or needs repairing (keep a copy of all letters).

- Always put all complaints in writing, with dates.

- Keep paying the rent until the end of the contract.

- Keep the house and garden clean and tidy.

What you shouldn't do

Agreeing to rent a property

You should not sign a contract:

- Without seeing the property.

- Until you are happy with the property.

- Until you have seen the exact property you will be living in. If the landlord says it's 'the same' as yours, don't sign.

- Put the dustbins out for the bin men on the right day. Use the recycling bin properly.

- Pay rent on time or you could have to pay charges. If you can't pay on time tell the landlord, who may allow you to pay late.

- Turn off the water supply if you go away in the winter to stop the pipes freezing.

- Clear food out of the sink so it does not get blocked.

- Ask the landlord if you are allowed to stick pictures on the walls, even with Blu-tack, as this can leave a mark and the landlord could make you pay for redecorating the whole wall. If they say yes, confirm in writing. ■

- Without having it checked by the Student Advice Centre.

- Unless you are sure you want to stay in the property and can pay the rent until the end date on the contract. >>

Paying money

You should not pay:

- Any money to the landlord or agent before you sign the contract. You should not pay to secure the property in case you change your mind.

- More than £400 deposit (at most).

- More than £40 'signing fee' (the best landlords do not have one at all!).

- The deposit to somebody unless you are absolutely sure this is the landlord or agent and their name is on the contract.

- Money to another tenant in the property - it should always go straight to the landlord.

What you rent

Avoid:

- Stopping rent because of disrepair. The landlord can take you to court for not paying your rent even if you feel you are entitled to compensation. Get advice first.

- Renting from another tenant in the property. This is called 'sub-letting' and is probably forbidden in the contract.

- Moving into a property without having your name on the contract. You may not have any rights - the

landlord could probably evict you at any time.

- Renting your own room, or part of it, to another person without the landlord's written agreement.

- Renting a room in a council property either from the council or a tenant. You could be evicted and could lose your visa.

- Agreeing to share a room, unless it is clearly designed for two people.

- Making any changes to the property unless the landlord has agreed in writing. This can include decorating, hanging pictures or fixing satellite dishes.

Understanding your rights

To make sure you are protected avoid:

- Agreeing to anything you are not sure about without asking the Student Advice Centre first.

- Agreeing to anything without putting it in writing, signed and dated.

- Being pressured into signing for a property you know is not right for you.

- Renting with people you are unsure about.

- Being too trusting – even people from your own country can sometimes do or say wrong things.

Many landlords are good people but some are only interested in your money and think it is easy to exploit international students.

Moving in

Getting the keys and moving in

- You can get the keys on the date your contract starts.

- Each tenant should be given a front and back door key.

- The landlord may be allowed to refuse to give you the keys if any rent or deposit money is due. Check your contract.

- The landlord should also give you the burglar alarm code (if there is one) and details on how to work the central heating.

- Read the meters and send readings to the utility company straight away. Make sure everyone in the property has their name on the bills.

Disrepair?

- Tell the landlord straight away. Put all complaints in writing and take photographs for evidence. If you can move in you should.

- If you feel you can not move in contact the Student Advice Centre for advice. If you pay for a hotel or sign for another property you could lose a lot of money.

- Give the landlord a reasonable time to do any work, 24 hours if it is an emergency or five days if it affects your comfort.

- If the previous tenants have not moved out, contact the landlord straight away. The landlord may have to give you alternative accommodation until they move.

Anything missing or broken?

- Tell the landlord straight away. You can do so by phone but make sure you write as well, otherwise it could come out of your deposit.

- Take photographs for evidence.

- Remember, the landlord only has to provide what has been agreed in the contract. ■