Many of you will soon be looking for your first houses in preparation for your next year, maybe even your second third or fourth. We’ve put together this guide based on the questions you and fellow students have asked before, to make your house search as simple as possible.

We’ve covered everything from who to live with, what to look out for in house viewings, and charges and payments you should look out for. If you’re concerned about anything, it’s likely that someone else has been too, and your Student Advice Centre is here to help!
Where should I live? Many students after their first year will move into rented houses away from the University's various campuses. We've made this guide to help those of you thinking of moving out of halls and into private accommodation.

However, if you like the convenience and comfort of University halls, it is possible to stay, or move into halls if you wish, and there are several independent halls you can apply to as well. For more information, contact the University's Accommodation Office; accommodation@nottingham.ac.uk

Who should I move in with? Don't rush into signing for a house if you're not 100% sure who you want to live with or where! Consider how happy your group will be living together; is anyone thinking of dropping out? If you're going to be living with a couple, how stable is their relationship? Remember once you've signed, you're bound by your contract.

Think about everyone's budgets and requirements, how you're going to split the bills, what each housemate's views are on guests staying, and if you share views on tidiness and chores; these may sound trivial now in the buzz of house hunting, but can lead to disagreements in your house.

If you haven't found anyone or you're unsure of who to live with, please contact your Student Advice Centre and we'll be happy to advise you further.

Which area should I live in? This depends on a whole number of things. Average rents in different areas vary, as does the size of properties and local amenities. There are a number of things to consider:

- How long will it take you to get to University (for both studies and extra-curricular activities)?
- Does public transport meet your needs?
- Where are your friends hoping to live?
- Are you close to shops, services and other amenities?
- Do you feel safe in an area (visit in the day and at night)?

The University's accommodation website has a brief guide to different areas: www.nottingham.ac.uk/accommodation/accommodationoptions

When should I start looking? Some housing providers start advertising accommodation for the following academic year as early as November. However, there is no reason why you couldn't start looking before your exams are over at the end of Semester 1 in January.

We're aware that first year students often feel pressured by other students and providers to start looking for accommodation for the next academic year in their first term - but there is no shortage of accommodation in Nottingham, so there's no need to rush. This way, you will be able to focus on your January exams, and you will get to know the people you plan to move in with a lot better.

Where should I look? You can find accommodation through a variety of ways, often though seeing letting boards on houses, word of mouth or looking online.

If you are looking for accommodation in the Nottingham City area, we recommend that you prioritise Nottingham Standard Properties where possible: www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/NottinghamStandard

The Nottingham Standard helps tenants identify properties that meet a minimum quality standard and it accredits good landlords providing quality approved and well managed accommodation.

If you're a student at UNAD, Derby City Council have a similar scheme – the Derby Accredited Property Scheme.

Local letting agents operate in student areas, and many students find accommodation through them. If you are thinking about using an agency, make sure they are members of an independent complaints scheme and offer client money protection – by law, they have to. You should check they are members of a professional body such as ARLA or NALS.

Fellow students are also a useful source of information about how agents operate – looking at Google Reviews can often give you an idea of their customer service (although these are obviously unverified views!)

How should I choose the right property? It’s advised to check that the property has a ‘House in Multiple Occupation’ (HMO) license. – all properties with 3 or more storeys and occupied by 5 or more tenants require a licence. In some Nottingham City areas, additional licencing requirements are applicable to any HMO occupied by 3 or more tenants.

If the property is in the Nottingham City area, you can check the Nottingham City Public Register of Licensed HMOs via the Nottingham City Council website. You can also ask the landlord or agent for a copy.

If you live in other areas, or you have checked and the property isn’t licenced when you think it should be, email us suadvice@nottingham.ac.uk for more information and advice.
How much should I pay for accommodation? As you'd expect, how much you pay depends on the area, size of the property, what's included in the rent, what type of accommodation it is and how long the contract is for.

In Nottingham, most students in 2016/17 paid over £80 per week rent for a room in a shared house.

Bear in mind that price doesn't always relate to quality of accommodation or quality of landlord/agent, so do your homework before signing. Check what's included in the rent. It could be that you are paying rent only, or your rent could include things like utility bills (water, gas, electricity), broadband, telephone line, TV licence etc.

All-inclusive deals aren't always cheaper, so it's always a good idea to do your sums – some deals also cap the amount of gas/electricity if you use over a set amount so you may find yourself paying the extra.

Likewise, bill sharing services often charge a premium for simple things like buying a TV licence, so we strongly advise you to have a think about whether you want to sign up to such services.

You can always try and negotiate before signing the contract, for things like cheaper rent, shorter tenancy length, bills included etc.

Our experience is that students who don’t rush into signing and wait until after Christmas are more successful in negotiating with the landlord.

Viewing a Property: We recommend viewing the property and ensuring that everyone you’ll potentially be living with goes to see it. Make sure you are prompt and, if you don’t know the area, find directions beforehand.

You should find our Love Your Home House Hunting Checklist useful, which is a checklist of things to consider when you are viewing properties. Taking the time to inspect a house properly, and asking the right questions may save you hassle later on so it’s worth doing.

Ask the current tenants if they have had any concerns or comments about the property, area, and landlord/agency.

What money am I likely to be asked to pay?

Tenancy Deposit: It is likely you will be asked for a ‘tenancy deposit’, also known as a ‘holding deposit’, and is paid to reserve the property whilst the landlord carries out a tenancy check. Once the landlord has confirmed that you can rent the property the holding deposit usually changes to a damage deposit. This must be protected in a tenancy deposit scheme within 30 days of handing it over.

Retainers and Half Rent: You may also be asked to pay a retainer/half-rent for the summer period.

A retainer is a non-refundable payment which usually covers the period before your tenancy starts, usually for the months July and August. It is often equivalent to half rent for the period it covers and does not entitle the tenant to occupy or store belongings at the property.

Alternatively, you may be asked to pay half rent for the summer vacation period. However you may be entitled to occupy the property during this period, but this will depend on what it says in your contract. You may be liable for any bills from the start of the tenancy, even if you are not occupying the property.

Agency Fees: If you find a property though a letting agency or estate agent, you will probably be asked to pay fees such as agency fees, administration fees, booking fees and/or finder’s fees.

Make sure you understand the charges being made by the agency. You may find the same property being let via another agency with lower charges – this might be something worth checking out. You can only be charged if and when an agent is successful in finding you somewhere to live.

By law, agents should clearly display a breakdown of their fees in their office and on their website. If in doubt, ask for further details.

It is a criminal offence for an agent to ask for money to register you or for supplying details of houses to let. You shouldn’t be asked to pay any money before you agree to take a property.

REMEMBER: You can negotiate on the terms of the agreement including the admin fees, contract length and rent payable, but bear in mind these may not be agreed.

What type of contract do most students sign?

The contract will set out your rights and responsibilities, as well as those of the landlord. You also have certain rights, whether or not they are in the contract. Assured shorthold tenancy agreements are the most common form of tenancy for anyone renting privately - most students sign joint fixed-term assured shorthold tenancy agreements. A joint contract means you are renting the whole property as a group and, importantly, the landlord can hold everyone jointly responsible for the rent. A fixed-term tenancy means that unless there is a ‘break clause’ you will be tied to the contract for the whole term – most students who want to leave a house have to find a replacement.
can I get my contract looked over before I sign it?

Contracts can be complicated documents and your Student Advice Centre will be more than happy to check over your contract before you sign. An experienced adviser can go through your contract with you to make sure you understand what your rights and responsibilities are and to highlight any clauses that you may want to discuss further with your landlord/agent. You will need to book an appointment, as we often get booked up in advance.

Your landlord should give you 24 hours so you can take the proposed contract away and read it through properly.

Signing for a property

When more than one group of students are interested in a house, you may feel under pressure to sign and secure the property. However, you need to remember that once you have signed a contract you are legally committed for the duration of your tenancy. This is likely to equate to several thousand pounds of expenditure, so it makes sense to be absolutely certain before you put pen to paper.

If the landlord or agent says they are going to make improvements, change any furniture, decorate etc. before your tenancy starts, it is advisable that this is confirmed in writing. Ideally this would be included in the contract detailing exactly what is being done, a completion date and what happens if the work isn’t completed by this time (e.g. reduced rent until the work is completed).

Signing of a joint tenancy agreement should be done together – if you sign on one day and someone pulls out you could potentially be tied to the contract still.

There is no cooling off period for contracts – once you’ve signed, it is legally binding.

Some landlords provide inventories with the contract you sign – this is a list of everything your landlord provides with the property e.g. furniture, carpets, appliances etc. (if this isn’t provided at the time of signing, make sure you have one when you move into the property as it can help avoid deposit disputes at the end of the tenancy).

Referencing

Landlords or letting agents may run a credit check to see if you have a bad credit rating before accepting you as a tenant. If you fail a credit check, you may risk losing any fees you have paid.

You will probably have to provide proof of identity to the landlord or agent. Don’t hand over any personal documents to anyone without knowing who they are.

You should also be asked to prove you have the right to stay in the UK and the right to rent. It is a legal requirement for landlords to carry out right to rent checks.

If you haven’t rented before, you may be asked for the contact details of your parents, or asked for a guarantor.

What is a Guarantor?

Some landlords and agents ask for a guarantor form to be completed. Your guarantor (usually a relative) will become liable for your financial responsibilities, which means they will be liable for your rent if you don’t pay. They may need to meet certain criteria and be asked to provide financial and other details and be based in the UK. If you or they are not happy about this, look for somewhere else to rent.

Your landlord may ask that you provide a Guarantor, a person who is usually a relative, who will guarantee to pay rent and/or damages for which you are liable for under the contract.

Be aware that Joint Tenancies could mean that YOUR Guarantor is liable for another tenant’s rent or for damage they have caused – make sure any guarantor form limits your guarantor’s liability to your rent/damage only. Check your guarantor is happy to sign the form before paying any money towards the property.

International students are likely to find it difficult to obtain a Guarantor based in the UK. In most instances, they are asked to pay more rent up front.

Potential Problems

- If you have paid to reserve a property, but the landlord gives it to someone else and gives you all your money back, there is very little you can do. If you are not out of pocket, our advice would be to put it down to experience and find somewhere else to live.

- Once you’ve decided on a property, decide on who is going to have which bedroom before you sign so that doesn’t become ‘a thing’ after you have signed.

- If someone fails their exams and doesn’t come back to University, you could potentially be liable for their rent if you have a shared contract.

- Some students move in to find the promised items or works are not complete. Email or text the landlord before you are due to move in to check that any items agreed are on track.

- Paperwork and rent outstanding? Some landlords will not issue keys and include this in the contract. Check when you need to pay the rent and whether you will have the money available if the rent is due before your student finance comes in.

Student Advice centre

Contact us for more housing advice and information.

Email: suadvice@nottingham.ac.uk

Telephone: 0115 8468730

Website: www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/advice/housing-advice
Top Tips for House Hunting

We advise you to wait until your exams are over before you start looking for accommodation. However, there are a few things you can start to think about before you start looking.

Housemates, choose wisely
- Fully consider the size and dynamics of the group so that suitable accommodation can be found.
- Consider everyone’s budgets/needs and aspirations.
- Make sure you would be happy living with your chosen housemates for a whole year.
- Ensure you have similar views on cleaning, socialising and guests staying.

House hunting, the search!
- Understand the type of contract you are signing and what this means.
- Make sure you get a copy of the contract you have signed.
- Speak to the previous tenants about the landlord, the property and the area.
- Check if your landlord is a member of an accommodation scheme as this ensures your property meets certain standards.
- Confirm tenancy start dates, who is managing the property, full contact details for your landlord and any extra services that would be included.
- Ensure you are happy with the area, local facilities and transport.

Money, it's all about the money
- Compare the rent to other properties in the area.
- Confirm the rent includes bill, how frequently and by what method is it to be paid.
- Check for hidden costs such as agency and admin fees.
- Check if the landlord requires a deposit.
- Confirm with the landlord/agent the arrangements for the protection of your deposit.
- Ensure you are happy with contractual arrangements such as any summer rent concession and requirements for guarantors.
- Make sure you get detailed receipts for any money paid over.
- Don’t pay any money until you are happy to sign the contract.

Houses, the house itself
- Think carefully about utility costs (has the property got gas central heating, is it double glazed throughout and is it fitted with an efficient boiler?)
- Ensure you see a copy of the gas safety certificate for the property.
- Get a list of furniture and appliances that are included in the rent.
- Don’t forget to look at the gardens and outside space.
- Check that everyone is happy with their room size.

Remember
The Student Advice Centre in your Students’ Union can go through housing contracts with you, so you know exactly what your rights and responsibilities are. Our Housing Advisers can also answer any housing queries you have.
House Hunting Checklist

You’ve collected together some potential housemates and are starting to think about where you’re going to live next year – great! But before you jump into anything, there are loads of things worth thinking about; everything from location and room size to pricing and a decent landlord will affect whether, for the next year, you love – or hate – your home.

We’ve put together this useful checklist to help you decide if the house you’re checking out is for you.

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<th>ONE POINT</th>
<th>SIX</th>
<th>The Location: How long will it take you to get to Uni?</th>
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<td>Close enough to shops and services</td>
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<th>TWO POINTS</th>
<th>The House, check for</th>
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<td>Close enough to shops and services</td>
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<td>Parking or cycle storage, if you need it</td>
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<td>Sights or smells of mould or damp</td>
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<td>Room sizes everyone is happy with</td>
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<td>Showers and hot water that work well</td>
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<td>Whether furniture is included</td>
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<td>Double-glazing throughout</td>
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<td>Adequate communal living space</td>
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<th>THREE POINTS</th>
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<td>Working smoke detectors</td>
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<td>A working burglar alarm</td>
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<td>Lockable window</td>
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<td>Sturdy external doors</td>
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<th>FOUR POINTS</th>
<th>Money, figure out whether</th>
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<td>Bills are included in the rent</td>
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<td>The house seems worth the rent</td>
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<td>Refurbishments or rent price and negotiable</td>
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<td>It is a joint or individual contract</td>
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Ask the landlord
- If they have a gas safety certificate
- Whether they are part of an accreditation scheme
- If you can see a copy of the HMO licence (if the property requires one)
- Which tenancy deposit scheme they use

Ask the current tenants
- If the landlord completes repairs quickly enough
- If they’ve enjoyed living there
- Whether there are any outstanding problems with the house

Tick for yes and a cross for no!

Rate the property...

[TICK FOR YES AND A CROSS FOR NO!]

Learn more about Love Your Home

www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/advice
TELEPHONE: 0115 846 8730
EMAIL: suadvice@nottingham.ac.uk