

YOUR GUIDE TO...

# HOUSE HUNTING

2018/19



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*Looking for accommodation can be both an exciting and daunting time and there are many different things to think about. The Advice Service has put together this guide to give you an overview of things you need to know when looking for private rented accommodation.*

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# WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

There are lots of options when choosing somewhere to live. It is good to explore the different types of accommodation before deciding which option to go for.

## Shared houses/flats

- Most popular housing option
- Living with friends or course mates
- Greater freedom and independence
- Own bedroom
- Shared communal areas : kitchen and bathroom and living spaces
- Joint responsibility for rent and bills
- Contracts usually fixed in length- for one year
- Bills may not included in the rent and you will need to set up your own accounts with suppliers
- Responsible for your own cleaning and garden maintenance
- Landlord responsible for repairs

## University Accommodation

May be limited availability for returning students in some years. Check the RISIS Portal for details of when applications for halls of residence for returners will open for the following year.

- Rent is inclusive of bills and internet
- Can be more expensive than living in a shared house however contract lengths are usually shorter than private lets
- Choice of contract lengths – 51, 44 or 40 weeks
- Low deposit
- On-site security – CCTV and Halls Wardens offer a secure environment and welfare support.
- Within easy walking distance of campus
- Live with friends or make new friends
- Specifically adapted rooms for those with a disability
- Depending on the choice of room, there may be more people sharing facilities – there are studio options and smaller flats available

## Living with resident landlord

- Renting a bedroom in a landlord's home
- Bills may be included in the rent
- Flexible shorter contracts- but can be fixed in length
- Less rights and responsibilities - may have to leave at short notice
- Check for house rules – what time is the heating turned on? Can you have visitors?
- Kept in good state of repair as landlord's home

## Private halls or residence

Similar to living in University halls of residence but owned and managed by private organisations.

- Rent is usually inclusive of bills
- Can be more expensive than living in a shared house or university accommodation
- Usually longer contracts than university accommodation (51 weeks)
- Low deposit
- In-house security and maintenance
- There may be communal spaces such as games rooms or study spaces
- Usually members of ANUK Code of Standard for Larger Developments

# CHOOSING YOUR HOUSEMATES

Before you start looking for somewhere to live, you might want to think about who you are going to live with.

If you are living in shared accommodation, think carefully about who you choose to live with. Take your time to decide and consider whether you could live together for a whole year before committing to signing an agreement.

Disagreements between housemates over household topics such as noise, cleaning and bills are one of the most common problems in a shared house!

## Top Tip

Before signing your contract, everyone in the group should have an honest and open discussion about what they expect when sharing a house. It helps to know people's habits, hobbies, preferences and personalities before you move in together.

It might also be useful to think about drawing up a Housemate Agreement to help avoid misunderstandings later on about what you had agreed.

## Things to think about and useful questions to ask future housemates

- What is each housemate's budget? Are there things you are willing to compromise on? You may not be able to afford the heating on at all times but you may want your computer running all day. After bills and other essentials are paid, will one housemate be struggling financially whilst the others can afford to go out- this can lead to tension.
- Where would you like to live? Think about the distance from campus and the town centre. Do you cycle or would you need to pay for public transport?
- Do you want to live with people from your course or from halls? Remember, the person who was the most fun during Freshers' Week might not be the most reliable person to live with!
- Would you want bills included? How would you sort this out between yourselves?
- What time do you go to bed? Do you get up early or are you a night owl? Will your housemates be up early whilst you want a lie-in? Would it be a problem if your housemates are up and about whilst you are trying to sleep?
- How much time do you need to spend quietly studying as part of your course?

- How clean & tidy are you? Think about whether you are laid back about tidying or do you like things neat? Would it be a problem if some housemates are messy? Would you agree to a cleaning rota or would you prefer cleaning to be more on an “as and when” basis?!
- Can you cook? Would you want to eat together or separately? It can be cheaper to buy in bulk and share cooking, as long as you like similar things!
- Do you prefer a small or large bedroom? Would you be happy to sleep on the ground floor – or would you prefer the top storey? Make sure you agree on choice of bedrooms before you sign and move in! Remember not all rooms will be the same size. Would housemate’s with a smaller room pay less rent or will you all share equal rent?
- Will there be an agreed limit on guests? Do you expect to have friends over regularly? Will you put a limit on how many nights overnight guests can stay before they contribute to bills?
- Do you plan to live in the house for the full year? Are you planning a study abroad semester or placement? Does everyone need the house for the same length of time?



# HOW MANY PEOPLE SHOULD I LIVE WITH?

- The average student house accommodates 4 people, but you will be able to find properties for more or less
- Generally in larger households, the rent per room will be cheaper.
- You may need to look early for larger properties or if you have specific needs or there are more than five of you.
- Bigger households are more likely to have problems with people dropping out or changing their mind, and there is more negotiating needed when deciding how the house runs.
- If a large group of you want to live together it may be easier to break up into two groups and look for houses in the same street.

## What happens if you have not found someone to live with?

Don't worry! If you have not found someone to share with there are plenty of places to find others in the same position. Why not try...

### Notice boards

Check out the RUSU Find a Housemate Noticeboard – Ask at RUSU Reception, in the Students' Union building at Whiteknights campus

### Flyers

Keep an eye out for notices posted in departments or buildings around campus.

This is a good way to look for private landlords advertising properties

### Facebook:

Students often post adverts for spare rooms in the Reading University Students' Union Find a Housemate Facebook Group. You can also post an advert if you are looking for accommodation:

[facebook.com/groups/RUSUFindahousemate/](https://facebook.com/groups/RUSUFindahousemate/)

### Halls of residence

- You could also think about living in private halls of residence or returning to University accommodation.
- You can find a list of private halls providers on our website:  
[rusu.co.uk/accommodation](https://rusu.co.uk/accommodation)
- Contact the University's Accommodation Office to speak to someone about returning to halls.  
[reading.ac.uk/ready-to-study/accommodation/university-accommodation.aspx](https://reading.ac.uk/ready-to-study/accommodation/university-accommodation.aspx)

# WHEN TO START LOOKING FOR ACCOMMODATION

When you decide to look for a house is up to you, but make sure that you take your time and do not rush into a property that does not best suit you and your future housemates.

- Properties for the next academic year usually begin to be advertised by letting agencies and landlords early in the academic year- often from the end of October / beginning of November.
- Spare rooms in shared houses are advertised on the RUSU Find a Housemate Facebook group throughout the year so it's useful to keep an eye out- especially if you have not found a group to share with.
- Rooms in private halls are likely to be advertised early in the year – so keep an eye on the websites for details.

## Tips

- Do not rush into taking the first property that you see- look at as many as you can!
- Whilst the student rental market in Reading fluctuates, in general there are usually enough properties to accommodate everyone who wants one, although you might have to think about compromising on some of the things you want from your ideal property.
- If you have specific needs or there are more than five of you then you may want to look a little sooner.

RUSU Advice Service runs Housing Talks annually which take place around October/ November. We give handy tips on things to think about when privately renting. Keep an eye on our website for details.



# WHERE TO LOOK

There are a number of ways of finding the right property or room for you. The information below provides details about the common places that students will find accommodation, as well as some tips on avoiding scams

## Letting agents

- Are appointed by the landlord to advertise and manage the letting of the property.
- Usually have access to large number of private rented properties.

### Which agent should I use?

RUSU cannot recommend or endorse any lettings agency but you can find a list of some of the local, regulated lettings agencies on the RUSU website: [rusu.co.uk/accommodation](http://rusu.co.uk/accommodation)

When choosing which agency to use, things to look out for include:

### Is the letting agent a member of a redress scheme?

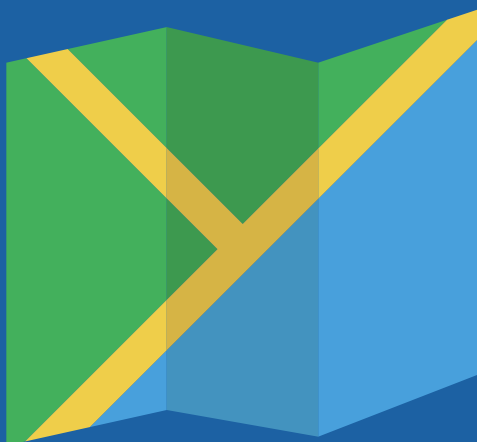
It is a legal requirement that all letting agents and managing agents belong to a redress scheme. If you have a complaint about the agent that you are unable to resolve directly, you can refer your complaint to the redress scheme.

Currently, there are two government approved redress schemes:

- The Property Ombudsman: [www.propertyombudsman.co.uk](http://www.propertyombudsman.co.uk)
- The Property Redress Scheme: [www.theprs.co.uk](http://www.theprs.co.uk)

### Voluntary Accreditation?

The best agencies are usually members of an accreditation scheme and we recommend that you only use an agency that is accredited. Although membership is voluntary, agencies who subscribe follow a code of practice with additional rules and standards above the legal minimum. Tenants can expect a higher level of service and can complain if standards are not met.





### **Some of the accreditation schemes to look out for include:**

ARLA /Propertymark  
[www.arla.co.uk/](http://www.arla.co.uk/)

NAEA/ Propertymark  
[www.naea.co.uk/](http://www.naea.co.uk/)

NALS - National Approved letting Scheme  
[www.nalscheme.co.uk/](http://www.nalscheme.co.uk/)

RICS Royal Institute for Chartered Surveyors  
[www.rics.org/uk/](http://www.rics.org/uk/)

### **What does a letting agency do?**

The type of service offered will depend on the agency and could either be :

#### **Introductory Service**

The agent advertises the property and introduces the student to the property/ landlord. They are likely to draw up the tenancy agreement and arrange for signing but take no further interest in the tenancy. Following this the students deal with the landlord directly.

#### **Management Service**

The agent introduces the student to the property and then manages any problems and collection of rent. This means they should ensure that issues such as repairs are dealt with. In this situation, although the tenants may sign the contract with the agency, they still have a right to know the name and address of the landlord. If you request this information in writing (by email or by post recorded delivery) the law states you should receive a written statement with the landlord's name and address within 21 days. It is a criminal offence not to provide this information to tenants without a reasonable excuse.

#### **Will I need to pay a fee?**

From 1st June 2019 the Tenant Fees Act prohibits landlords and letting agents from charging tenants most fees in relation to renting a property in the private sector. This will apply to new and renewal contracts after this date. From 31st May 2020, this will apply to all tenancy agreements, even those signed before 1st June 2019.

You may be asked to pay a Holding Deposit to reserve a rental property prior to signing the contract. The maximum amount that can be taken as a holding deposit is the equivalent of one week's rent. The deposit is refundable unless you decide not to proceed with the tenancy, or should you fail any referencing checks.

## **Websites**

**Lettings agents and landlords often advertise properties on websites- popular websites include:**

- [www.rightmove.co.uk](http://www.rightmove.co.uk)
- [www.zoopla.co.uk](http://www.zoopla.co.uk)
- [www.onthemarket.com](http://www.onthemarket.com)

**You can also find rooms advertised on:**

- [www.gumtree.com](http://www.gumtree.com)
- [www.spareroom.co.uk](http://www.spareroom.co.uk)

- [www.wearehomesforstudents.com](http://www.wearehomesforstudents.com)
- [www.homesforstudents.com](http://www.homesforstudents.com)
- [www.accommodationforstudents.com](http://www.accommodationforstudents.com)

### Word of mouth

Not all of the best properties are openly advertised. Do not be scared to ask 2nd and 3rd years if their house will be available next year, and what it is like. They can put you in touch with the landlord or agent. Ask friends and acquaintances if they know of any properties due to become available.

### Newspapers

Sometimes rooms and properties are advertised in local newspapers- usually in the “Classified” section

Reading Chronicle: [www.readingchronicle.co.uk](http://www.readingchronicle.co.uk)

Get Reading : [www.getreading.co.uk/in-your-area](http://www.getreading.co.uk/in-your-area)

### Around Campus check:

- Your department notice board
- Noticeboards in the Students’ Union and
- The library

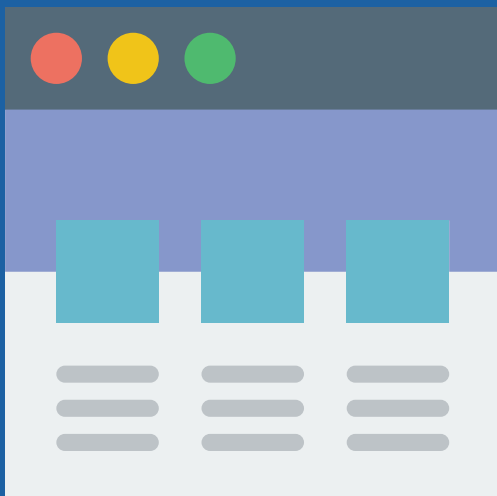
### Noticeboards & Shop windows

You might find properties or rooms advertised informally on postcards or home printed adverts in shop windows or supermarkets.

### Facebook Reading University Students’ Union Find A Housemate Group:

[www.facebook.com/groups/RUSUFindahousemate](http://www.facebook.com/groups/RUSUFindahousemate)

Adverts are posted here by students looking for a housemate because someone has dropped out of university or decided to move into a different house. Students who are looking for accommodation also advertise here.



# LANDLORDS

The landlord is usually the person – or company – who owns the property. Keep in mind that the owner may not always be the landlord. RUSU Advice Service cannot recommend or discourage students from using particular landlords.

## A good landlord will....

- Give contact details, including telephone number; postal address and email address
- Be easy to contact and reply promptly
- Supply a clear contract with fair terms
- Agree a schedule of works to be completed prior to the start of the tenancy
- Will not pressure you into signing the contract.

## Does your landlord need a licence?

- Some student houses require mandatory licensing by the local authority: [www.gov.uk/private-renting/houses-in-multiple-occupation](http://www.gov.uk/private-renting/houses-in-multiple-occupation)
- The licence should be held by the landlord or person managing the property.
- The licence should be displayed prominently in the entrance of the property.
- The licence lasts for up to 5 years.

## Licensing helps to:

- Maintain safety in private rented accommodation.
- Ensure that landlords – or managers- are fit and proper people.
- Ensure that the standard of management is adequate.
- Ensure that the property is suitable for occupation by the number of people under the licence.

Check to see if the licence has been obtained by contacting the local authority's Environmental health department or HMO Licensing Team.



# SCAM TENANCIES

- Rental fraud occurs when a person is tricked into paying an up-front fee for a property which in reality may not exist, or be owned by the person to whom the fee has been paid.
- Fraudsters will often target individuals - both UK based and overseas - through online advertisements, usually placed on accommodation websites
- Prospective tenants are convinced to part with credit card details or cash before seeing the property. Payments are then not returned and the person cannot get in contact with the supposed “landlord”.

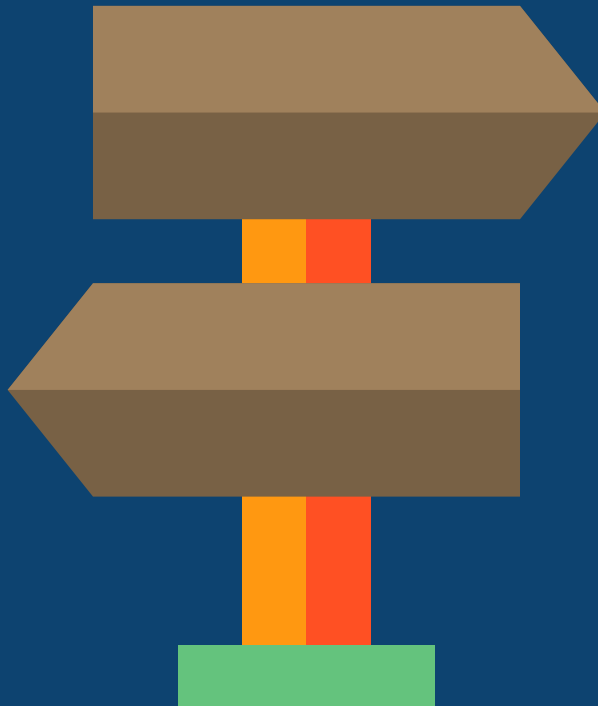


## Warning signs

Not all websites carry out checks on the properties being advertised or the people advertising. Fraudsters often target students with offers of accommodation which are not genuine. Some signs to look out for include:

- Offers which are too good to be true. The rental price is slightly below the market average and the offer looks much better than anything else for the same price in the area.
- Be wary of both very detailed ads which promise a lot, and vague ads with few details.
- Avoid pursuing ads where the landlord is abroad and cannot meet with you or show you the property.
- Until you have physically viewed the property, avoid signing a formal agreement or paying a deposit.
- Check the Land Registry to verify ownership of a property, and for reassurance if you are not confident that the advertiser is the owner of the property: these checks incur a fee: [www.gov.uk/search-property-information-land-registry](http://www.gov.uk/search-property-information-land-registry)
- Do not agree to, or feel pressured into, sending money using Money Transfer services - such as Western Union or Moneygram - at any part of the agreement.

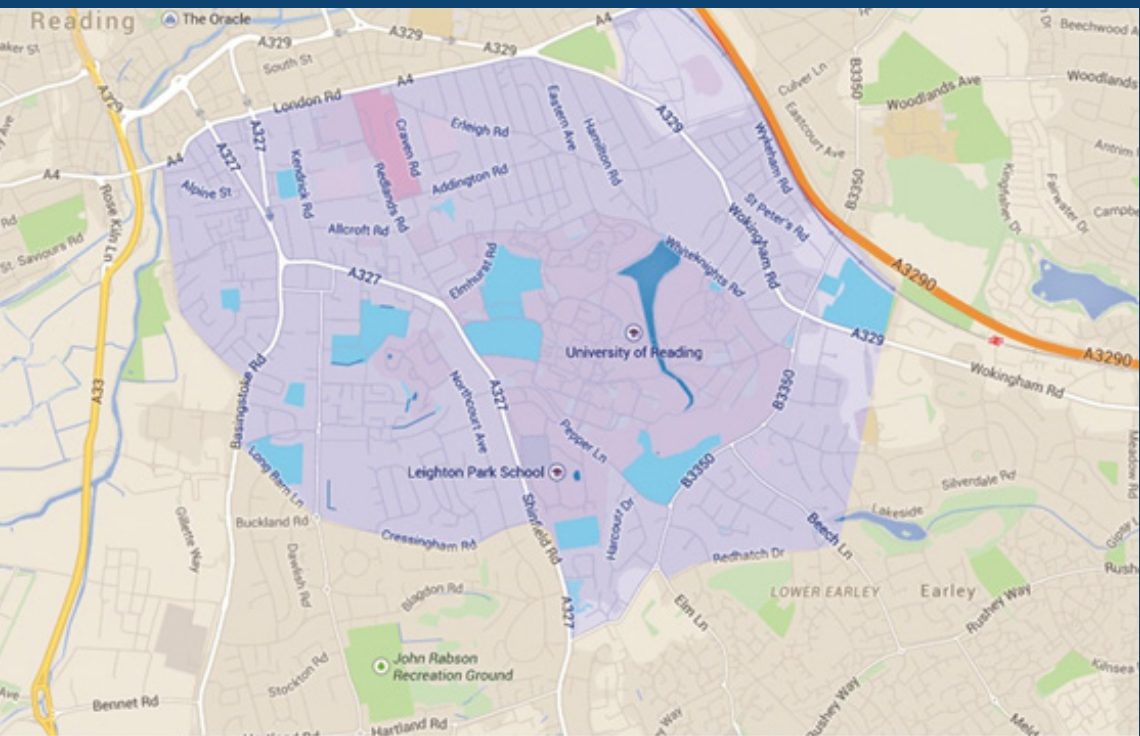
**If you've found a property and have a tenancy agreement, The Advice Service offers housing advice, along with a Tenancy Agreement Checking Service. Email [advice@rusu.co.uk](mailto:advice@rusu.co.uk) to make an appointment**



# WHERE DO YOU WANT TO LIVE?

- Many roads between the University and London Road, Wokingham Road, Christchurch Road, around Cemetery Junction, and the Basingstoke Road are full of student houses.
- If you live close enough to the University and town to walk/cycle you will save money on travel but houses further away may charge lower rents.

The blue part of the map below shows the most popular student areas in Reading



# BUDGETING FOR YOUR HOUSE

- The cost of your housing will represent a significant part of your budget and managing your budget is crucial.
- You should work out how much rent you can afford and stick to it!
- You will need to find affordable accommodation as living in a property outside of your budget can cause problems later on.
- Costs can vary depending on how many live in the house, the area and the size of the property.



- Work out a budget for all your expenses and remember to factor in all your expenditure including utility bills, food, travel, as well as the cost of academic provisions and socialising!
- There are online resources to help you budget effectively, such as: [studentcalculator.org](http://studentcalculator.org) or [www.themoneycharity.org/resources](http://www.themoneycharity.org/resources)
- You can also use the table overleaf to help plan your budget.

## Rent

The average number of rooms in a student house is 4 or 5 and rent can vary from around £350 per month to £450 or more per person.

- You are normally expected to pay this at the beginning of each month.
- Some tenants are asked to pay termly in instalments - particularly if living in private halls. If this is the case check your student finance payment date is before the payment date.
- Generally, students are expected to sign a contract which runs from July to June. If you are renting over the summer and not living there, try to negotiate a reduced rent, particularly if you cannot use some areas of the house due to repair and building work.
- If you do not have a guarantor, you may be asked to pay several months' rent in advance. Try to negotiate this amount with the landlord.

## Household Bills

With some tenancies, bills may be included in the rent. You might find this easier to manage but it might not be the cheaper option. You will be paying the same throughout the seasons regardless of how much energy you use. You may also find that the landlord controls the heating and temperature settings which can be difficult in winter months.

If bills are not included and you are living in a shared house, make sure that everyone has budgeted for this and is comfortable with their contribution.

Utility bills can be around £60 per month, per person, but this varies between houses.

Remember: you are entitled to change your energy provider so shop around to find the best deal. You must let your landlord know if you change supplier





## TV Licensing

If you have a Joint Tenancy Agreement for the whole house, you should only need one TV Licence for the property (£155.50 for the year). If you rent a room in a shared house and have your own contract, then you will need to be covered by your own separate licence. You may get a refund if you don't live in the house for a full year! If you're not sure what licence you need, or to buy a licence, check the TV Licensing website at: [www.tvlicensing.co.uk](http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk).

## Landline/broadband

Remember to budget for these- and shop around for the best deals.

## Council tax

All residential properties have a charge of Council Tax, made by the local authority.

If you live in a property occupied only by full-time students, the property is exempt from council tax if certain criteria is met.

## Full time = 21 hours of study per week ; 24 weeks of attendance each year

You will need to let the local authority know and provide them with a Certificate of Exemption, which can be obtained from Student Support Services or RISIS self service Portal.

If there are non-students living in the house, they will probably need to pay Council Tax. Remember, if your course finishes before the end of the contract, you also may become liable for Council Tax.

Average housing costs for a four bedroomed terraced house – use this table to help you budget...

Average yearly cost		Your budget	
Rent	£4000	Student Loan	£
Water (Between 4)	£350.00	Other Grants	£
Broadband (between 4)	£260.00	Earnings	£
Electricity (between 4)	£700.00	Other Income	£
Gas (between 4)	£1100.00	<b>TOTAL C</b>	£
Electricity (between 4)	£700.00		
Contents Insurance	£150.00		
TV Licence (Between 4)	£150.50		
<b>TOTAL A</b>	£		
		<b>Yearly Cost Total [A+B]</b>	£ [D]
Food	£		
Hobbies/Socialising	£	<b>Yearly Cost Vs Budget [C - D]</b>	£
Travel	£		
Course Costs	£		
Other	£		
<b>TOTAL B</b>	£		

# ADDITIONAL COSTS OF RENTING

## Agency fees

From 1st June 2019 the Tenant Fees Act prohibits landlords and letting agents from charging tenants most fees in relation to renting a property in the private sector. This will apply to new and renewal contracts after this date. From 31st May 2020, this will apply to all tenancy agreements, even those signed before 1st June 2019.

These are the charges a landlord or letting agent can still make:

- **Holding Deposit** – to reserve a rental property prior to signing the contract. It reserves the property for the tenant whilst referencing is carried out and the tenancy agreement is drawn up. The maximum amount that can be taken as a holding deposit is the equivalent of one week's rent. The deposit is refundable unless the tenant decides not to proceed with the tenancy, or should they fail any referencing checks such as the Right to Rent checks.
- **Changes to Tenancy Fee** – if a tenant requests a change to the tenancy agreement, such as, a replacement tenant, the landlord or letting agent can charge up to £50. They may be able to charge higher, but only if they can prove that the costs involved are higher. This may be in the form of receipts or invoices. The law states that they do not expect that a charge higher than £50 would be acceptable in most instances.
- **Late Rent Payment Fee** – A landlord or letting agent can charge a fee if you pay your rent late. Under the new legislation, where the payment has been outstanding for 14 days or more, interest can be charged at no more than 3% above the Bank of England's annual percentage rate for each day it is outstanding.
- **Lost Keys/Security Devices** – the amount charged must not be more than a landlord or agent's reasonably incurred costs in replacing the lost key or security device. You do not have to pay the fee until you have received evidence of the cost incurred.

All lettings agencies must display their fees in their office and on their website. They must also explain whether these fees are per property or per individual and must be inclusive of VAT. If a landlord or letting agent charges a prohibited fee, and does not refund this, you can speak to the Trading Standards team within your Local Authority, who have a duty to enforce the ban.

## Guarantors

Landlords and agencies often ask you to provide a UK based guarantor who agrees to pay for rent or repairs if you cannot pay. This is not a legal requirement, but is allowed as part of a letting agreement. For UK students the most common guarantor is a parent whereas EU and international students may be asked to provide an alternative that lives in the UK. The guarantor should only agree to guarantee the individual person and not the whole house. Guarantor Agreements are legally binding documents and should always be in writing.

The University of Reading has a partnership with YourGuarantor who can act as a UK rent guarantor for students renting in the private sector. The scheme is discretionary and is open to both home and overseas students (EU & Non-EU), undergraduates and postgraduates. Further information about this scheme can be found on the University website.

# DEPOSITS

## Holding deposits

- Once you have found the right property-and you are certain that you want to rent it, you will need to reserve the property.
- You will most likely be asked to pay a holding deposit (reservation fee) to show that you are interested in the property and want to make an offer to the landlord.
- It usually means that the property will be taken off the market and not offered to anyone else while referencing is carried out.
- After 1st June 2019, the law states that the maximum holding deposit that can be requested is the equivalent of one weeks rent.

## What happens if I change my mind?

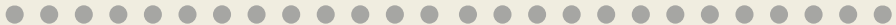
We advise that you do not pay a holding deposit unless you are absolutely sure that you want the property as this is usually non-refundable if you decide not to take the property. Check the agency's terms and conditions before you pay and get a receipt for money paid.

## What happens if the landlord rejects my application?

If the landlord rejects your offer the holding deposit should be returned to you in full. However, if you have failed referencing checks, they may withhold the deposit.

## What happens to my holding deposit if I proceed with the tenancy?

It usually counts towards your first months' rent or security deposit if you decide to live in the property.



### Holding deposit receipt

- Address of the property
- Amount of the holding deposit
- Proposed rent
- Contract length
- Start date of tenancy
- Additional requests: professional cleaning-redecoration – extra furniture
- Refund rules if you – or the landlord-withdraws the offer or you fail referencing

# NEGOTIATING

There is high demand in Reading for housing and negotiating rent can be difficult.

Compare rent prices for similar properties online, and with other agencies, to find out if you are paying a fair price

## **You could also try to negotiate over things other than rent:**

- Extra/replacement furniture
- If the landlord needs to carry out work before you move in- try negotiating a discount- especially if you will be unable to access the property
- Could you sublet to someone else if you do not need to live in the property for part of the year?

If you agree any extras with the agency- make sure that the landlord agrees too! Get any promises confirmed in writing!

It's a good idea to do this before paying your holding deposit. You can ask for them to be written on the holding deposit receipt or as an addendum to the tenancy agreement.

# RIGHT TO RENT CHECKS

Once you have paid your holding deposit, as part of the Right to Rent Checks, landlords and letting agents must confirm your identity and immigration status.

Landlords must check that all people living in their property are over the age of 18 and it is their main and only home, and have the right to rent.



# DAMAGES DEPOSIT

- You will also be expected to pay a damages deposit before you move in- this is also known as a security or tenancy deposit.
- From 1st June 2019 the maximum amount that a landlord can ask for is the equivalent of 5 weeks' rent (if the annual lease value is less than £50,000)
- The deposit can be used to pay for damages or any unpaid rent at the end of the tenancy.
- At the end of the tenancy, if you hand back the property in the same condition as at the start of the tenancy, the landlord (or agent) should return the deposit to you.

## **Deductions can be made for:**

- Unpaid rent
- Damage or disrepair
- Cleaning

By law, if your tenancy agreement is an assured shorthold tenancy (AST), your landlord must protect your deposit within 30 days of receipt, in one of the three government approved tenancy deposit protection schemes:

## **Tenancy Deposit Scheme**

[www.tenancydepositscheme.com](http://www.tenancydepositscheme.com)

## **Deposit Protection Scheme**

[www.depositprotection.com](http://www.depositprotection.com)

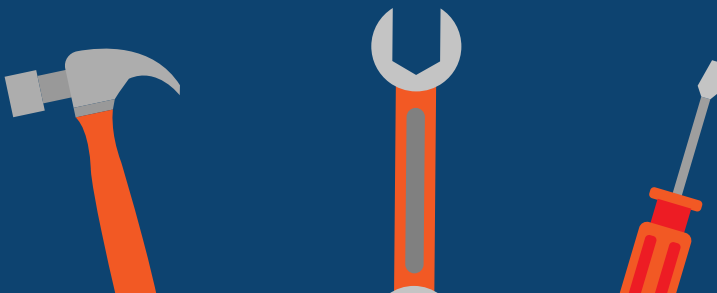
## **MyDeposits**

[www.mydeposits.co.uk](http://www.mydeposits.co.uk)

- Also within 30 days of receiving your deposit, your landlord must provide you with the relevant 'prescribed information' which sets out where your deposit is being protected, and how you can get it back at the end of your tenancy
- There are penalties for failure to protect the deposit which could include financial compensation.
- The deposit scheme can adjudicate if there is a dispute over deductions at the end of the tenancy.

## **Your landlord does not need to protect your deposit if:**

- You are a lodger, sharing your accommodation with your landlord.
- You and your landlord live in separate flats in the same converted house.



# CONTRACTS

- Accommodation contracts are legally binding documents and are often long and complex.
- Your contract (tenancy agreement) is there to protect you and the landlord so you should read it carefully before signing

## **We recommend that you:**

- Check that it is accurate and includes anything agreed with landlord/agent
- Take the contract away before signing to be checked by a Housing Adviser.
- Don't sign until you are 100% sure you want to live in the property. If you do not agree with the terms- or do not understand anything, do not be afraid to speak to the agent or landlord and do not sign the agreement until you are happy with it.

Use our handy 'Guide to Housing Contracts' for further information



**Be a smart house hunter! Do not believe everything you are told. Here are some common Myths about renting.**

**Myth#1: All the good houses will go very quickly. I need to sign the contract quickly.**

Fact: Making a decision under pressure often means that you will settle for something that is not right. You could also miss out on something you would have really liked- had you carried on looking.

**Myth#2: If I find a house I want to live in, I have to accept its condition.**

Fact: If you have found a house that you like but have noticed some damage-or things you would like to change—you can ask the landlord. If the landlord agrees to decorate, or change anything in the house, write it at the end of the contract, and ask the landlord to sign this agreement.

**Myth#3: You should get a house before Christmas.**

Fact: Houses are available throughout the year and letting agencies add new properties after Christmas. Some agencies try to market less popular properties first and persuade you that you might not find what you are looking for if you wait. Remember, if you sign up early and change your mind, you may find it difficult to get out of the contract.

**Myth#4: I have a specific need but I will not get support if I rent privately.**

Fact: Landlords are prohibited from treating you less favourably if you have a disability and are looking for accommodation. Landlords have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled tenants. Landlords cannot charge a higher rent or deposit for disabled tenants.

**Myth#5: if I break the terms of the tenancy agreement, the landlord can evict me.**

Fact: Many contracts use legal and out-dated language which is difficult to understand. Housing law may override the contract, particularly if terms and conditions are deemed 'unfair'. Your landlord can only evict you with a court order.



# INSPECTING A PROPERTY

- Once you have found a property that you are interested in, the next step is viewing.
- Make sure you carry out a proper inspection before you pay any money- or sign a contract
- Try to view the property during daylight- and take your time- if viewing with the agent- do not let them rush you.
- Make sure everybody views the property to avoid disagreements later- use the Property Viewing Checklist provided to make sure your house is as good as it sounds.

## Tips

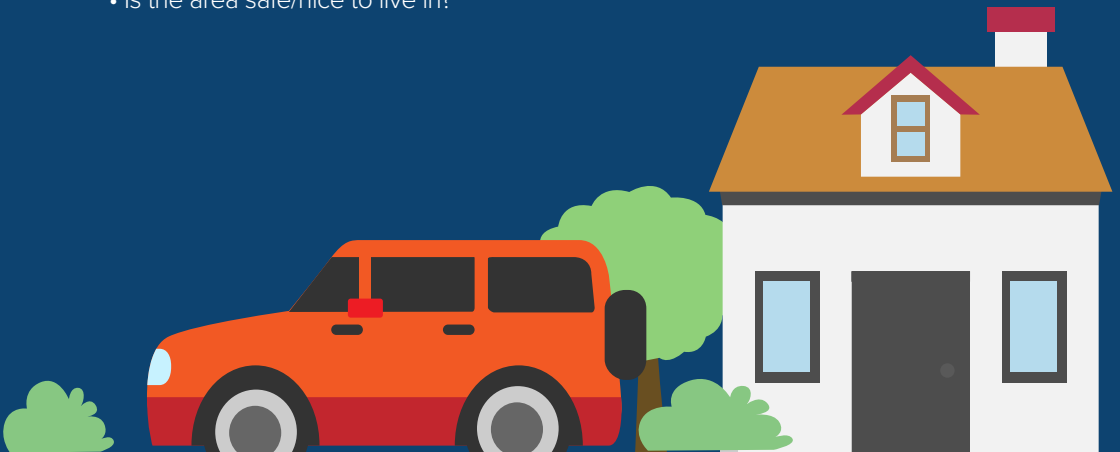
- Talk to the people already living there
- Ask the current tenants if there have been any problems with the house or difficulties with the landlord or agent. This may be difficult if the landlord or agent is present but tenants can usually warn you of any pitfalls or reassure you that it would be a good move.
- For your own safety, never view a property alone and try to visit in daylight so that you can have a good look around the outside and area in general.
- If you are part of a group- make sure everyone visits the property and agrees that it is suitable before paying any money and signing a contract.

## Questions to ask the landlord/agent

- Who manages the property? Do you deal only with the agent if there is a problem or can you contact the landlord?
- Who do you report repairs to?

## Questions to ask current tenants

- Does the landlord/agent carry out repairs promptly?
- Does the landlord/agent visit the property- regularly?
- Are bills included? How much are they likely to be?
- If included in the rent, are there limits to how often the heating is on?
- Are there pre-payment meters fitted for gas and electricity?
- What are the neighbours like?
- Is the area safe/nice to live in?







# HOUSE VIEWING CHECKLIST

This list provides a guide to some of the things to think about. They are not all legal requirements and you will need to decide what your priorities are.

**Property address:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Tenancy

- Availability: When is the house available?
- Contract: Is the tenancy a joint or sole contract?
- Have you read the tenancy agreement? Are you happy with it?
- Can you take a copy away and have it checked?
- Will the landlord be living in the house?
- Term: Is the tenancy fixed in length? Is there a break clause that means both landlord and tenant can end the contract early?
- Who is the landlord and/or agent? Is the address on the contract? Who will be your point of contact?
- Will the landlord be doing any works over the summer? Have these been agreed in writing?
- Will you be compensated if at any time during the tenancy rooms are unavailable?

## Location

- Is the area right for you?
- Have you visited at night- is there adequate street lighting?
- Is transport easily available? Think about how you will get to the supermarket
- How will you travel to campus? How close is the property to University?
- Are there shops and services nearby?

## Cost

- What is the rent?
- Are bills included?
- How much is the deposit and with which deposit protection scheme is it protected?
- Will there be any reduction in rent over the summer months? Especially if major works are planned and there will be restricted access
- Are there any extra charges the landlord might make- are these in the contract?

## Health & Safety

### Interior

- General condition: is the property well looked after? Is it clean & tidy enough for you to inspect it properly?
- Are the facilities adequate for the number of tenants? Are you happy with the communal areas- size-furniture?



- Windows & doors : does the property have double glazing?- this saves money on heating bills. Do they close properly ?
- Plumbing: Have you tried the taps? Does the plumbing work? Do sinks drain? Does the toilet leak?
- Bathroom facilities: How many toilets are there? Does the shower work? Is there adequate ventilation?- inadequate ventilation can cause condensation
- Kitchen: Do all appliances work? Is there sufficient storage?- remember all tenants need to fit cooking equipment and food into cupboards! Is there ample fridge / freezer space?
- Bedrooms: Are they different sizes? If so, how will you decide who gets what? Is the mattress clean and comfortable? Is there enough space for your belongings?
- Heating: Is there adequate heating: what kind of boiler does the property have?
- Energy supply: is there gas as well as electricity? Which companies supply the property? Does the contract allow you to change supplier?
- Energy meters: Are they easily accessible? Are there pre-payment meters-the tariff is set higher. Is there a smart meter to help monitor usage?
- Appliances: are the appliances sufficient? is there a washing machine and tumble dryer. Is there adequate space to dry clothes inside- remember drying clothes on radiators can lead to condensation. Is there a washing line? Will appliances be replaced if the cannot be repaired? Will the landlord repair/replace small appliances like kettles and toasters? Are there instructions for all appliances?
- Furniture: What furniture is included – is it adequate for all housemates? What condition is it in? Is it fire retardant? Agree any extras in writing
- Walls: are there any gaps or cracks? Is the sound insulation good enough between your rooms and between you and neighbours? Is redecoration needed?
- Mould & damp: Does it smell musty? Are patches of paintwork or ceilings dis-coloured?
- Electrical sockets: how many electrical sockets are there?
- Pests: Look out for signs- traps in the kitchen- droppings; slug trails; bedbugs;fleas

### **Exterior**

- Have you been given an Energy Performance Certificate? This will help to know how energy efficient the property is.
- Roof & gutters? Are these in good order- do the gutters need cleaning? Are there any missing or slipped slates- this could make the property colder in winter
- Do the drains look clear? Who pays for blocked drains, leaky roofs and blocked guttering?- check the contract
- Windows/doorframes: is there any unsafe or rotting woodwork?
- Exterior walls: Any cracks or holes- How well insulated is the property?- are bed rooms on external walls as these could be colder in winter months
- Rubbish disposal: Are waste and recycling bins provided- is there an area suitable for rubbish storage?
- Garden & fences: Are gardens, walls, fences and boundaries well maintained? Who is responsible for maintaining the garden?



### Safety features

- Smoke detectors: is there at least one smoke detector fitted on each floor? Do they work?
- Are there fire blankets/ fire extinguishers?
- Electrical Safety: Have you seen electrical safety certificates (HMO). Are plug sockets free from cracks or damage?
- Gas safety: is everything checked and tested? Have you seen a valid Gas Safety Certificate?
- Are Carbon monoxide detectors fitted where there are solid fuel burning appliances?
- Locks- Are external doors solid? Are there adequate locks on all external doors- and windows ? Are there locks on internal doors? How many sets of keys will you be given? Are any keys missing?
- Windows: can windows be left open without risk of burglary? Are there curtains?
- Number of Occupiers: Does the property need a HMO Licence? Is it displayed in the entrance?
- Furniture: Do soft furnishing have safety tags and comply with Furniture and Fire Regulations 1988?
- Could you evacuate in an emergency?



# RUSU ADVICE SERVICE

## CONTRACT CHECKING SERVICE

**please contact:**

**By telephone** – 0118 378 4100

**By email** – [advice@rusu.co.uk](mailto:advice@rusu.co.uk)

### **Housing Advice**

[www.nus.org.uk/en/advice/housing-advice](http://www.nus.org.uk/en/advice/housing-advice)

### **Citizens Advice Wokingham**

0300 330 1189  
[www.citizensadvicewokingham.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvicewokingham.org.uk)

### **Reading Borough Council Tax Office**

0118 937 3727

### **Wokingham Borough Council Tax Office**

0118 974 6000

### **Reading Borough Council Environmental Health**

0118 937 3787

### **Reading Borough Council HMO Licensing**

[www.reading.gov.uk/hmo](http://www.reading.gov.uk/hmo)

### **Wokingham Borough Council Environmental Health (including HMOs)**

01635 519192

### **University of Reading Community Relations Manager**

[www.reading.ac.uk/about/working-with-the-community](http://www.reading.ac.uk/about/working-with-the-community)  
0118 378 6764

### **Reading Borough Council Housing Advice Team**

0118 937 3757  
[www.reading.gov.uk/residents/housing](http://www.reading.gov.uk/residents/housing)

### **Wokingham Borough Council Housing Needs Team**

0118 978 6754/6756  
Located at Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN  
[www.wokingham.gov.uk/housing-and-tenants](http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/housing-and-tenants)

### **Citizens Advice Reading**

0300 411 1306  
[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

### **Shelter – the housing and homelessness charity**

[www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)  
0808 800 4444