



ADVICE CENTRE

FREE INDEPENDENT AND IMPARTIAL ADVICE

Student's Guide to House Hunting



In partnership with



Hull Student
Accommodation
Rating System
hullstar.com

HULL UNIVERSITY
UNION

Contents

Before You Start	3
Searching for Housing	4
Signing Up	5
Moving In	6
During Your Tenancy	7
Moving Out	8
Contract Checklist	9
Jargon Buster	9
Housing Checklist	10

The Advice Centre team are on hand to provide free, impartial advice and information on all aspects of housing, including house hunting, dealing with landlords and housemate disputes.

Whether you're renting privately, with the University or you have your own home, our team is ready to help with any query. The information in this booklet is tailored to students renting houses. If you need advice on purchasing a house, please contact us!

House Hunting

The most important thing to remember when you're house hunting – give yourself the time to think your decision through fully! Rash decisions only lead to trouble. Take your time and work through the checklist below to make sure you don't miss anything!

Before You Start

Sit down and have a chat with the people you're wanting to live with – make sure you're on the same page when it comes to the following questions. Want to live on your own? You've only got yourself and your own needs to think about – bonus!

1. When?

We believe that the best time to start looking for your accommodation is after your exams. You've settled into university life, made sure you've found the best people to live with and you won't have house-hunting on your mind at the same time as deadlines. In Hull, there are more houses than students so, don't worry, there'll still be a place for you! Take your time and shop around.

2. Budget?

It goes without saying that it's very important to ensure that you can cover your accommodation payments. Many students sign up for properties that cost more than their loan payments. You need to think about how you will make up any shortfalls in your rent.

3. What's included?

What do you want to be included with your rent? Meals/bills/a cleaner? Are these things hidden costs within your rent? Don't be afraid to ask questions or bring your contract into the Advice Centre for a free contract check.

4. Contract Dates?

Sometimes you will be offered a 52 week contract when you might not be here for a portion of that – you can negotiate your contract dates and terms – especially over the summer months.

5. Location?

The further you head out from campus the cheaper your property may be but the cost of travel may be higher. Research and speak to the bus companies about weekly/monthly passes if you choose to live further from campus.

6. Must Haves?

What are your non-negotiables in a house? Do you need bills to be included? A TV? Wifi? Wheelchair accessibility? Whatever you need, make sure you get it by checking your contract thoroughly.



SEARCHING FOR HOUSING

Some landlords will tell you that all the houses are going and fast. Believe us, there is way more choice than they lead you to believe and you have plenty of time to shop around and make sure you get the right house for you.

The best recommendations come from current and previous tenants. So talk to your fellow students, ask the current tenant for a private chat and check hullstars.co.uk for honest student reviews of your house.



1. Location

You know what they say! Location, location, location! It's a major consideration when choosing a house, so be sure to research the safety of the area and check if it's convenient for amenities, transport links, and the commute to uni.



2. Outside the Property

Before you enter a property on a viewing, have a good look around the property and make sure that everything looks intact and tidy. Do the walls look like they have had damp? Is the garden overgrown or full of rubbish? Does the guttering look blocked? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, bring it up with the landlord.



3. Security/Safety

Be sure to check: Does the property have a security system? Is there a security chain on the door? Are there any broken windows or clear 'weak spots' and are the fire safety provisions adequate? If you are looking at a HullSTARS audited property you can be 100% confident that the property meets all of the safety and security standards for a rented property.



4. Gas and Electricity

Be sure to test each house, has it got adequate heating, a working cooker and hot water? Check before and when you move in.



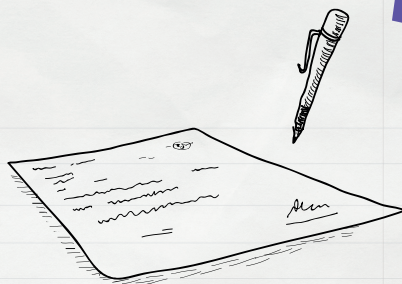
5. Appeal

Finally, the big one! Do you like it? If you're feeling panicked and pressured or you've looked at five properties in a day you may end up signing up for a property you only have lukewarm feelings for. This is going to be your home for a whole year so it's ok to ask for a second viewing, make sure you like it and use the checklist at the back of this booklet to keep track of each property you're visiting.



Signing up

Ok, so you've found your dream property and you're ready to sign the contract. Before you do, go back for a final viewing and keep the following things in mind.



1. Repairs & Safety

Take a final walk around the property. Is everything in good working order? Are there enough smoke detectors/fire alarms/fire safety equipment? Is there anything you want doing before you move in?

2. Furniture

Is there everything you might need? Enough seats in the living room or dining room? Does your bedroom have a desk if you need it?

3. Deposits

As of April 2007 all deposits must be protected. Your landlord has to inform you within 14 days of receiving the deposit which scheme they are using. Most landlords are asking for non-refundable admin fees now so make sure you clarify what you are paying.

4. Bills/Service Provision

Is there an up to date gas safety certificate, are all appliances in good working order and does the heating work? Are your bills included and does that include Wi-Fi? Check which bills are included and ensure that you have enough of an allowance per person. We suggest £12-£15 per person per week as a guide depending on which bills are included. For help with your budget check out hullmoneydoctors.co.uk.

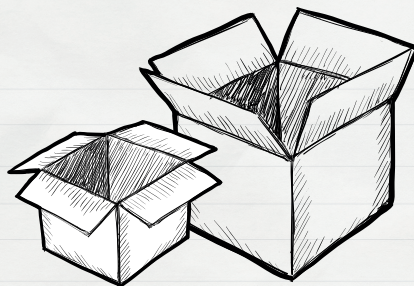
5. Contracts

They can be a minefield! When in doubt, bring your contract to us to have it checked before you sign. If a landlord has made promises at the viewing, ask them to write it down within the contract, that way, they have an obligation to supply it. Most importantly, don't sign unless you are 100% happy. There is no cooling off period and once you've signed, there's very little you can do to get out.



Moving in

The day is finally here, you're moving in. Take pictures of everything and meter readings on the day you arrive! You might need your evidence at the end of your tenancy.



1. Promises

Have the additional requests been kept? If not, come in and see us.

2. Inventory

Has your landlord provided you with an inventory? If not, write your own one up. From knives and forks, to vacuum cleaners, include every item that your landlord has supplied with the property and hand this to any other tenants and your landlord to sign and date. By doing this you are protecting yourself from suffering any unfair charges for furniture or appliance you've never had.

3. Damages

We always advise that you take photos on your first day in the property. These will act as evidence should there be any damage or disrepair issues at the end of the tenancy. You should only be charged for damages you have caused.

4. Your Housemates

You never really know someone until you live with them. Always be respectful and make a cleaning rota to solve any squabbles over who took the bin out last.

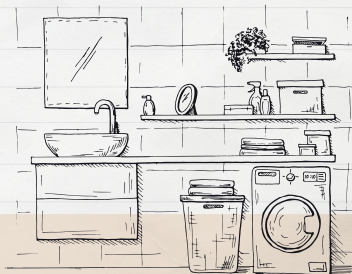
5. Neighbours

Introduce yourself! This can have all kinds of benefits. From finding out which day your bin goes out to having someone take in parcels for you. You never know when you need to borrow a cup of sugar.



DURING YOUR TENANCY

You've settled in and your house has now become a home. This may be the first place you've ever rented so don't be afraid to ask questions we all had to start somewhere!



1. Bills

Whether you choose to split the bills between you, one person chooses to take on the management or you go with an external agency like Glide who can take the stress out of this for you, it is key for everybody to be on the same page.



2. Disrepair

Sometimes, disrepair issues will only become apparent once you move in. Remember, your landlord or letting agent is responsible for the structure and exterior of your home (walls/roof/guttering etc), the supply of sanitation (sinks/baths/toilets) and the supply of utilities (water/gas pipes/wiring/boilers/heating provision). They are not responsible for changing any easily accessible light bulbs or fuses. Notify your landlord of any issues you spot immediately and be aware that any security or sanitation issues need to be dealt with as an emergency.



3. Housemate Issues

It's ok to not get on with your housemates 100% of the time! Bear this in mind when someone's left their dishes on the side for too long, or plays their music too loud. A student house should be a space to enjoy and relax but if there are issues we can help by providing mediation in a safe and neutral space. The University of Hull take a strong stance on bullying, so come in and get support to resolve this.



4. Contact Release

Early contract releases are incredibly hard to come by. More often than not you will be asked to provide a replacement tenant for yourself or pay a re-let/release fee.



Moving Out

After you've grown attached to your house and housemates, moving out is always the worst bit! Don't worry though, if you've followed the tips in this leaflet you'll have everything you need!



1. Pack up

Make sure you take everything! You may think it's helpful to leave items like shelves or a cupboard, but be sure to check with your landlord first as you could be charged for removal. If you agree to leave things, get written consent.

2. Clean

Once you've packed you'll start noticing a few scuffs here and there. Fair wear and tear is to be expected and allowed but if there's anything major that wasn't there when you moved in you may be responsible for the repairs.

Doing these yourself is often far cheaper than what your landlord would charge.

Cleaning is the responsibility of all tenants' so try to make sure everyone does their bit before they move out however.

If you're the last person to move out and there's still a lot to do, you'll still have to get it done to ensure you get your deposit back.

3. Meter Reading

Take meter readings from your final day in the property, give them to the landlord and keep hold of them for a few months. If you've been on a bills included contract, you may be charged for the overuse of utilities at the end of your contract. It's why we advised that you check if there is a cap on your allowance. If you need any support speaking to your landlord about these issues we are happy to help.

4. Take Photos

Once everything has been moved out and the house is looking like it did when you moved in, wander around and take photos. Whether you move out early or you're the last one there, everyone should take their own set of photographs. This will avoid any unfair charges. If you already have a casefile with the Advice Centre, your adviser will be happy to receive these via email to add to your case – this is further evidence of the properties final state.

Photo: © Sean Spencer



CONTRACT CHECK LIST

A good contract should always include the following:

1. How much the rent is and when and how it should be paid – check that the rent adds up properly and that there are no extra charges
2. The landlord's and tenants' names and the address of the property being let
3. The date the tenancy began and it's duration
4. Who is responsible for the utility bills and council tax
5. Details of whether other people are allowed the use of all or part of the property, and if so, which part?
6. Whether the landlord will provide any services (i.e. laundry, cleaning), and whether there are service charges for these
7. The length of notice which the landlord or the tenant needs to give, if the tenancy is to be ended – there are statutory rules regarding this dependent on the tenancy and it's extremely difficult and often costly to end a tenancy early without just cause
8. The landlord's and tenants' repair obligations
9. The landlord's right of access, which should be at a reasonable time and preferably after 24 hours' notice

Jargon Buster

Joint and several

Your tenancy is linked to your housemates. You are all liable for any charges/missed rent payments.

Assured shorthold

The most common type of tenancy

Legally binding

All contracts are legally binding and very difficult or impossible to get out of.

Fixed term

Your contract will run for a fixed amount of time or a 'fixed term'

Sublet

Usually frowned upon, some landlords are now asking for sublet agreements if you want to be released from a contract. Subletting is a complicated one – if it ever affects you, come and see us.

Tenancy deposit protection

Your tenancy should be protected – the three agencies who do this are The Dispute Service (TDS), Deposit Protection Service (DPS) or my deposits.

Address Postcode

Date Viewed/...../.....

HullSTARS rated? Yes No

HullSTARS rating

Questions to ask:

Can we see/take away a blank copy of the contract?

.....

What does the rent include?

.....

Will we pay/how much is the deposit/admin fee?

.....

Who is responsible for garden maintenance?

.....



Outside:

Is the property well maintained? ☐

Are there any security issues? ☐

Does the property have a burglar alarm? ☐

Are the gutters clear/in good condition? ☐

Are there any visible issues with the roof? ☐

Living Room:

Is there are communal living space? ☐

Are there enough seats for the amount of tenants to all sit together? ☐

Are you happy with the quality of the furniture? ☐

Are there any signs of damp? ☐

Do the windows have working locks? ☐

Is it double glazed? ☐

Does it need redecorating? ☐

Is a hoover included? ☐

Bathroom(s):

Are there enough for the amount of tenants (minimum requirement?) ☐

Test the water – do ALL taps/showers/toilets work? ☐

Is there any cosmetic damage/visible issues? ☐

Is the sealant in tact? ☐

Is there adequate ventilation? ☐

Bedroom(s):

Are there enough plug sockets? (HullSTARS recommend at least 4 per bedroom) ☐

Is the bed the right size for the room? ☐

Are you happy with all of the bedrooms? ☐

Is there adequate furniture for you? (wardrobe, drawers, desk, chair, shelving) ☐

Kitchen:

Are the appliances you expect (fridge freezer, washing machine, oven) included? ☐

Is the fridge/freezer big enough for all of you? ☐

Are appliances in good working order? ☐

Is there any fire safety equipment? ☐

Are there any signs of pests? ☐

Do the current tenants have any issues?

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Any concerns?

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ADVICE CENTRE

FREE INDEPENDENT AND IMPARTIAL ADVICE

Useful Numbers

Advice Centre

01482 466263

huv-advice-centre@hull.ac.uk

Opening times

Monday/Tuesday/Thursday/Friday

9.30am – 3pm

Wednesday 12pm – 3pm

Hull Stars

01482 465216

hullstars@hull.ac.uk

Hull City Council

(for environmental health/noise
complaints/waste management and
benefits)

01482 300 300

East Riding of Yorkshire Council

(for environmental health/noise
complaints/waste management and
benefits)

01482 393939

Police non-emergency

101

Emergency Gas Line

0800 111 999

Gas Safety

0800 300 363



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