

NTSU's Pocket-sized **Housing** guide



NOTTINGHAM TRENT STUDENTS' UNION

Your Student Life



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If, like many students, University is the first time you'll be living away from home, here's some advice and guidance on choosing your accommodation.

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Starting your search

Some things to consider when it comes to searching for your next home:

Type of accommodation

There's lots of choice for students, from University halls of residence and private halls to private landlords and lodging. Do your research and find out which option would suit you most.

Location

There are plenty of chat forums to help you decide on which area to live in such as Studentroom, Tripadvisor and Facebook and Nottingham City Council has a Student Living webpage that may be useful.

Who you should live with

Trusting other people in your house is very important. Choose friends from your present house or Halls of Residence, your course, or your SU club/ society. Alternatively, if you're stuck for housemates, use facilities such as NTU's Message Board where you can place an advert to find fellow students.

Your costs

- What's your budget? Do you have maximum rent you want to pay?
- How much is the deposit to pay up front and when do they want it?
- Are there any other costs to secure the property - agency or reservation fees?
- Think about your cash flow and cost of living - will you need to catch a bus and how much is a ticket? Does the property have pre-paid gas/electric meters which can be more expensive? Does the rent include bills or is it separate?



Viewing the property

Meet the agent/ landlord

Is the landlord / agent friendly and welcoming and able to answer your questions? Don't feel pressured into a decision about renting a property. This is your opportunity to compare the advert with reality and to check what is included. Get any promises in writing as part of the contract.

Meet the current tenants

Ask what it's like to live there and if there have been any issues with condition of the property, or the attitude and conduct of the landlord and agent. If things went wrong – were they sorted? Meet them if you can, but don't just turn up unannounced.

Do the things in the property work?

- What's the security like?
- Do the locks work on the bedrooms and front door?
- Is it expensive or hard to heat?
- Is it double glazed and what kind of heating?
- Is the furniture new – is there enough and decent condition?
- Is there a desk in your room? Working internet connection?
- Look inside and under things for damp (especially in cupboards and against exterior walls) cracked grouting etc.

Ask about the utility bills

- Check where the meters and what kind they are (pre-payment or meter where you can take your own reading)
- If you are in a flat, it is important to check that it has its own meter so you do not have any problems getting accurate bills.
- Bills included in the contract – If the contract includes bills you need to know if there is a capped limit. If there is a cap, you will need regular information on the bill amounts so you can avoid having to pay at the end of the year.

Know your way around a tenancy agreement

What is a tenancy agreement?

- This is legally binding document
- Anything that you sign (including a booking or application form) will become a term and condition of the contract. Make sure you read it all and take copies.
- If you are not satisfied with what is written or want to add to a verbal agreement, you can amend the contract before signing it if all parties agree. Don't sign if you don't agree with everything that is written!
- The contract makes you financially responsible for the rent until the end of the tenancy.
- What happens if you change your mind or are unable to take up the tenancy for some reason? Before signing the contract you can risk losing money that you have already paid. This includes booking fee, advance rent or deposit. After signing the contract this can be the whole year's rent.
- Some landlords/ agents will ask for a guarantor who will be liable for any financial responsibilities under the terms of the contract. Check that your family are happy to pay if things go wrong before you pay anything. Check the wording on the guarantor form to ensure that they will not be financially liable for everybody in the property!

Read this checklist before you sign

Joint contracts

- Joint contracts mean that you are all liable for each other, this is known as 'joint and several liability'.
- This will make you all equally liable for rent, utility bills and any charges incurred i.e. damage/ late rent charges. If one of you fails to pay for something the landlord can chase any or all of you for the outstanding amount or take it out of your deposit, even if this seems unfair.
- Can you negotiate for an individual contract? This would have only your name on it and individual rent. It would be better for you!
- If someone changes their mind about taking up or staying in the property, please come and get advice. There may be implications.

What should be in your contract?

- The landlord/ agent's name and address
- Tenant's name
- Property address
- Start and end date of the tenancy
- How much rent and how it will be paid? Do the dates match your student loan dates?
- Which bills are included? If they are – is there a cap? How much? Is it realistic?
- Deposit information, amount and which scheme?
- Details of any break clause which will enable you and/or the landlord to terminate the contract by giving notice before the end of the fixed term.
- Get a copy of all your paperwork!



Deposits

Most landlords will want you to pay a deposit to protect them against any costs they incur for damage you may cause or against loss of rent if you do not pay.

If you have paid your rent, not caused any damage, kept your property clean and followed the advice in this guide you should get back all of your deposit.

Paying your deposit

- Avoid paying cash deposits, try to pay by card, bank transfer or cheque
- Make sure you receive a receipt at the point you hand over your payment
- Make sure your deposit is written on your tenancy agreement and recorded as a deposit.

Ensuring you get your deposit back

Moving in

- Take lots of photos of any scuff and dirty marks on the walls or floors, anything cracked, stained, or broken for reference.
- Email the photos to the letting agent/ landlord to confirm the standard of the property when you move in.
- Report any damages that occur after you've moved in as soon as possible and check if deductions will be made to cover the cost of repair. If you are going to be charged request that you see three quotes for the work and that any deductions are agreed and confirmed in writing.

Moving out

- Clean all rooms including cupboards, fridge/freezer, toilets, baths and showers.
- Make sure any outside space is clear and maintained to the agreed standard
- If you are responsible for them, replace any non-working/ missing lightbulbs.
- Contact your utility suppliers (if your bills aren't included) to settle your

accounts and inform them of the moving date.

- Before handing in your keys, take more photos. These photos will be your evidence if there is a dispute.
- At your checkout visit, ask your landlord to point out anything they're not happy with and give you the opportunity to rectify it.
- Ensure your rent is paid in full
- Return the keys and obtain a receipt for these
- Request the return of the deposit in writing

Deposit Disputes

If at the end of your tenancy your landlord wants to retain your deposit and you do not agree with the amount or the reasons, you are able to dispute the claim.

If your landlord wishes to make deductions from your deposit which you feel are unfair or unnecessary, you should ask your landlord to itemise these deductions in writing. E.g. Cracked freezer drawer – charge £50. You can then reply with an explanation and come to an agreement.

If you are unable to come to a mutually agreeable arrangement, you'll need to follow the procedure stated by your deposit guarantee company.

Unprotected Deposits

By law your deposit has to be protected in a deposit protection scheme.

Your landlord has 30 days to register your deposit. If you do not receive confirmation from the scheme within 6 weeks of paying your deposit, contact your landlord for details of which scheme it is protected in (there are three), then contact the scheme to check your deposit has been registered.

If a landlord fails to protect a deposit

If you have not received confirmation that your deposit has been protected and you have emailed your landlord to chase this without any results, the law says that you are entitled to have your tenancy deposit returned or protected.


Gather your Information

It's important to gather and review any evidence relevant to your case:

- Your tenancy agreement
- Evidence showing you paid a tenancy deposit
- Confirmation the deposit was against damage and loss (rather than rent in advance)
- Copies of any letters/ emails to and from your landlord
- Evidence that the deposit was not protected in a scheme.
- Anything else that may be relevant

This will help when you take further action.

Get in touch with the Information and Advice Service (IAS) for more information on the next steps.



When you're ready to move in

Check your contract

Before you sign a contract, make sure you read [this checklist](#).


If there is still something you're unsure about, make an appointment with the Information and Advice Service via www.trentstudents.org/seeanadvisor

Ask for an inventory

- This document that lists all the fixtures, fittings and furnishings provided by the landlord in your property and crucially, the condition it is in.
- Insist on a clearly-written inventory and check it at the property.
- Make sure both you and the landlord agree on the condition of the things listed.
- Ensure nothing has been missed off that they could try and pin on you when you leave (peeling wallpaper, scratches to coffee tables, stains to carpets etc.)
- Check for mould and damp in cupboards – particularly against exterior walls and the condition of the bathroom/ kitchen tiles and grouting.
- Try and get a few of you (or all of you) together to sign the inventory. Some landlord and agents will leave the inventory with you and expect you to return a signed copy to them by a set deadline in order to 'validate' it. If you do not agree with the content of the inventory, raise it as soon as possible.
- Take photographs of things for future reference.

Check your utilities

- Take a meter reading for your gas, electric (and sometimes water) and contact the utility providers with your moving-in date.
- Give the names of all the tenants using the services.
- Talk to the utility company about payment options or alternatively if your bills are included in your rent payments, get regular updates from your landlord or agent (particularly if there is a capped limit). You may need to refer to your tenancy agreement.



Whether you're living in private halls or rented accommodation, the safety of your home and belongings should be a top priority.

These simple steps will make you less vulnerable to burglary.

Lock up

This is the most important thing to remember, as a third of all burglaries happen because a door or window has been left open.

Lock up goods in your garden, including ladders, tools and bikes. Not only are these at risk of being stolen, burglars can also use them to break in.

Leave a light on

If you are going out at night, close your curtains and leave a light on to give the impression somebody is in. Keep valuables like your laptop out of sight.

Deadlocks

Ask your landlord to fit deadlocks to all outside doors – burglars hate them because you need a key to open them from the inside as well as the outside.

Get insured

Get your belongings insured as soon as you can just to be on the safe side. It's not worth chancing it.

Home security



Fire safety

Top 10 student fire safety tips:

- Fit smoke alarms on each level of the property, test them weekly.
- Never leave cooking unattended
- Never attempt to cook while under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Don't overload plug sockets
- Switch off electrical appliances like phone chargers and hair straighteners when not in use
- Take extra care with cigarettes and smoking materials
- Never leave candles unattended
- Check furniture is labelled as permanently fire-resistant
- Identify and practice an escape route
- If a fire starts, get out, stay out and dial 999

False alarms

Fire extinguishers and fire safety equipment are provided for the protection of the public, students and staff. Malicious activation of fire extinguishers or tampering with fire safety equipment is a criminal offence. Please visit www.notts-fire.gov.uk for more advice on keeping yourself and your friends safe from fire.

Know your rights

By law, your landlord must:

Get a gas safety certificate for every appliance in the property. These must be issued by a CORGI-registered gas engineer and renewed every year.

Ensure that any work identified by gas engineers is carried out.

Maintain and ensure the safety of all electrical installations (fixed wiring and so on) and any electrical appliances they provide (such as cookers and kettles).

Ensure any furniture and furnishing they provide meet the fire resistance regulations.

Tenants can also ask landlords to fit and maintain carbon monoxide detectors although these are not legal requirements. Landlords of certain buildings occupied by more than one household (e.g. houses split into bedsits) have extra legal obligations to provide adequate fire precautions and means of escape from fire.

Your local council's [Environmental Health Officer](#) will be able to give you more details about your landlord's obligations.



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