LOOKING GUIDE
Your comprehensive guide to finding the perfect house.

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR
LEGAL INFORMATION
CHECKLIST
INTRODUCTION

For most students looking to rent off-campus, there are two options: either live in a shared student household or live with a resident landlord.

If you’re intending to share with other students, think carefully about who you want to share with as this can have a big impact on your year in that house. Some people will prove to be wonderful housemates, but some might not, and it’s best to find out as much about someone as you can before you sign. Once you have signed your tenancy agreement, you may be liable for the rent and bills in that house for the rest of the agreement, even if you decide to move out.

It’s also important to know when to look. We strongly advise taking your time over finding a house you’re all happy with, or even a group of housemates that you’re completely happy with. Do not worry that if you haven’t signed by the end of term one you won’t find anywhere and all the good houses will be gone: this simply isn’t the case.

If you take your time and choose carefully, you’re more likely to get a better deal, and to have a better year.

WHERE TO LOOK

The last thing you need to know is where to look! The most obvious, but not always the most helpful place to look, is with local letting agents, but these will charge you administration fees, so we’d suggest a few of these options first:

» Move’m - an online service that we use to survey houses, landlords and letting agents in the local area, to get an honest representation of what it’s like to live locally.
» Word of Mouth – a house recommended by other students is often going to have the most honest representation.
» Students’ Union Housemating Sessions - running throughout the year with the first in January, see website for more details.
» The ‘RHSU Housemating’ & ‘Student Housemate Scheme’ Facebook pages.
IMPORTANT LEGAL INFORMATION

YOUR LANDLORD IS REQUIRED TO:

- Provide a smoke detector on each level of the property. i.e. on the staircase and near the kitchen.
- Provide a carbon monoxide detector which needs to be placed near the boiler and have an installation date written on/by the side of it.
- Provide a Gas Safety Certificate which needs to be updated annually by a registered engineer.
- Be able to provide an Energy Performance Certificate.
- All furniture must have a label stating it meets the requirements of the Furnishing Regulations Act 1988. If it does not, it could be a fire hazard.
- Place your deposit in a government protected scheme (The TDS, DPS or My Deposit). Ask your landlord to clarify which scheme they use before you move in. This will help ensure you get your deposit back at the end of the tenancy.
CHECKLIST

This is a useful checklist highlighting what to look out for.

ON THE VIEWING:

☐ **Furniture:** Make sure there is enough for everyone and that it is in good condition.

☐ **Flooring:** Check that the carpets are in good condition and are properly fitted, especially on the staircase. Check for any cracks/tears in bathroom and kitchen floor.

☐ **Heating:** Is there a sufficient heating system and is it suitable for your needs?

☐ **Bedrooms:** Make sure that there are enough bedrooms, and that they have everything you expect (bed, storage space, desk and study chair) as well as adequate heating and a window for ventilation and natural light.

☐ **Outside:** Do you have access to a shed? Is it clear of rubbish? Does it contain gardening equipment that is in good working order? Does the landlord provide a gardener?

☐ **Security:** Is there a secure lockable door at the back of the property? Does the front door lock properly? If there was a fire, could you get out of the property safely?

☐ **Roof:** Check the roof has no missing slates, no broken gutters and no moss or weeds growing out of the gutters.

☐ **Kitchen:** Make sure that it is big enough, with adequate units and worktops. Check that all kitchen appliances including the fridge, freezer and cooker are in good working order.

☐ **Bathroom:** Is the sealant around the bath and shower damaged? Turn on the shower to get an idea of the water pressure in the building. Also, check that the toilet flush works.
BEFORE YOU SIGN:

**Know the difference between a managed and unmanaged property!** If you have found a property through an Estate Agent, get them to clarify this. If the property is managed, you report all maintenance issues to the agent. If it is unmanaged, you need to report issues to the landlord directly. Make sure you keep the relevant contacts so they are available in times of emergency.

- Visit runnymede.gov.uk to check that the property has been accredited by Runnymede council.
- Ask the landlord if anyone else has keys to the property.
- Ask to see the landlord’s electrical safety certificate.
- **Ask the landlord or agent if you can see the inventory** which will state exactly what pieces of furniture will be staying at the property. If they do not have one, request that this is done before you move in.

Make sure any other appliances such as washing machines, microwaves and vacuum cleaners are included in the inventory and that the landlord will be responsible to replace them if they break down. Ask to include this in the tenancy agreement.

**Make sure you are happy with the Tenancy Agreement.** Don’t be afraid to question the meaning of certain clauses. You should not sign anything you are not 100% clear on!

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**Did you know that the Students’ Union has a contract checking service?** To book an appointment please email housing@su.rhul.ac.uk
Once you’ve found a house that you’re happy with, and people that you’re happy to live with, the next steps are all about actually securing your home! There are three big things that you’re going to be asked for to secure the property.

**HOLDING FEE**

The holding fee is a percentage of your monthly rent, normally either one month’s rent or slightly higher, and this confirms that the property has been taken off of the market for you. This will normally be deducted either from the amount which you will pay as your tenancy deposit, or will constitute your first month’s rent. It’s also normally non-refundable, so don’t hand it over until you’re 100% certain you want this house!

**DEPOSIT**

Your tenancy deposit is held to ensure that the property is kept in a good condition by the tenants and is properly maintained as the contract dictates. Depending on the letting agent, the sum required for this can be anywhere between one and two times the cost of one month’s rent, and any deductions made from this are at an amount which covers outstanding bills or rent and any damage the landlord can prove you’ve made to the property or contents.

Tenancy Deposit Schemes (TDS) were introduced in April 2007 to make sure that tenants’ deposits would be kept safe for the duration of their tenancies and would be returned to them in full within 10 days of the end of their tenancies unless there were legitimate reasons for withholding some or all of the deposit. If a disagreement between a landlord and tenant should arise over deductions, an alternative dispute resolution service can investigate.
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Since then, all landlords and agents have had a legal obligation to ensure that any deposit paid to them for an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) is protected by a TDS. If your tenancy has a rental income of £100,000 or less per year you are likely to have an AST. You should receive notification that your deposit has been protected within 30 days of you paying it.

**ADMIN FEE**
You’ll also be asked to pay an admin fee as well, and this is fairly standard practice with most letting agents. This essentially covers the costs of the work the letting agents have done to set you up with your property. Usually this is around £150, though it can be slightly higher. If this is starting to seem extortionate, you can seek advice from the Students’ Union.

**GOOD LUCK!**
Setting out to find housemates and somewhere to live for the next year can seem like a daunting task, partly because there are so many people you could possibly live with, and so many houses! The most important thing to remember is not to rush into anything, as you will most likely be required to cover the rent and bills for the property, even if your situation changes and you decide not to live there any longer.

The Students’ Union is there to support you, be that through our Advice and Support Centre or our Housing Campaign. If you’re not sure about a landlord, you want your contract to be checked before you sign it, or you need some advice or representation in dealing with your landlord or letting agent, then our Student Support Advisers are there to help you with all of these things. You can book an appointment with them at the Students’ Union Helpdesk, or you can email advice@su.rhul.ac.uk.

As your Students’ Union, we would like to wish you the best of luck as you move forwards in finding your house for next year! Just remember: don't rush, and be sure of who you're living with and what you want from your house!
USEFUL CONTACTS

ADVICE AND SUPPORT CENTRE
Based on the first floor of the Students’ Union, we offer you the opportunity to discuss any concerns you may have and receive advice from our team of experienced and professional advisers. You can book an appointment through the Union Helpdesk or by contacting the team below:

Web: su.rhul.ac.uk/advice
Tel: 01784 246700
Email: advice@su.rhul.ac.uk