

PRIVATE HOUSING LOOKING GUIDE

RH SU



HELLO.

We've packed our best tips for finding a new home into this guide, helping you to safely find accommodation and understand your rights as a tenant.

Take your time and make informed decisions - there's accommodation available throughout the year and this is a huge legal and financial commitment.

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03.

BEFORE LOOKING.

- Calculate how much rent, council tax + bills you can afford to pay: ask for guidance if you're unsure how much things should cost.
- Decide which area you want to live in: the more flexible you are, the more likely you are to find something to suit your budget. Keep your travel time and costs in mind though!
- Locate all the documents you'll need: landlords have to confirm your identity, immigration status (even if you're British), credit history and student status.
- Most landlords/agencies require students to have a UK guarantor. Those without a guarantor, including international/EU students, are usually asked to pay 3-6 months' rent in advance instead. If you usually live in the UK, but don't have a guarantor, get some guidance.

04.

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR.

- Online ads are not properly regulated and can have fraudulent users and scams.
- Avoid going to a viewing alone. Take a housemate or a friend along with you. If you don't have a good feeling, don't go.
- When your group attends a viewing, let someone know where you'll be.
- Never pay in cash.
- Don't sign or pay anything before having your contract checked by the Students' Union Advice Centre. You can book an appointment with the Housing Advisor, or just email your contract over to advice@su.rhul.ac.uk with the subject 'contract check'.

05.

WHERE TO LOOK.

>> HOUSESEARCH

HouseSearch is your free portal to hundreds of local properties, run by the Students' Union. You can use it to search for accommodation, post ads for rooms, and find housemates.

housesearch.rhul.ac.uk

>> ONLINE

You can find lots of accommodation advertised online, including on social media platforms. We've created a group to help:

bit.ly/RHSUHousemating

>> LETTING AGENTS

Most lettings are managed by lettings/estate agents who represent landlords. You should read the government's **How to Rent** guide before dealing with landlords and agents, so that you know your rights as a prospective tenant.

>> HALLS

Private halls, like Hox Park and Pad and Podium, are independent from the University. They're one of the easiest options if you're not able to visit the area, but they're also the most luxurious/expensive.

You can also apply for a priority placement in College-run halls on campus if it can help with your health problems or additional learning needs.

disability-dyslexia@royalholloway.ac.uk

06.

FEES AND CHARGES.

- Trustworthy letting agents will have a full and transparent price list on their website, including costs of possible future fees and charges.
- Most fees agents and landlords could charge were banned on 1 June 2019.
- You could be asked for a holding fee (maximum 1 week's rent; refundable unless you cancel) to stop advertising the property.
- Eventually you'll be asked for a security deposit (maximum 5 weeks' rent), and you will also have to pay the first month's rent before you move in. Check what dates these are due before signing.
- You can make an appointment to get help with budgeting by contacting Financial Wellbeing - moneymatters@royalholloway.ac.uk.

07.

ALL THE LEGAL BITS.

>> 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.
- All furniture must have a label stating it meets the requirements of the Furnishing Regulations Act 1988. If it doesn't, it could be a fire hazard.
- Place your deposit in a government protected scheme (TDS, DPS or My Deposits). Ask your landlord which scheme they have placed your deposit in before you move in, if they haven't sent you a confirmation this was done. This will prevent unfair deductions being made from your deposit.

08.

ATTENDING VIEWINGS.

- We want to make sure you know how to keep safe while you're viewing properties during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. Check out our guidance on safe house viewings [here](#).
- It can be hard work/impossible getting your landlord to fix things after you've signed. Landlords and agents often make promises they never fulfil during viewings, so if they promise to fix things, ask them to put it in writing.
- If the current tenants are present during the viewing, ask for their contact details so you can get some background on the landlord/agents. You can ask them about what the bills are like, too. They are more likely to be honest without the agent/landlord present.
- 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 to guarantee you have adequate furniture and appliances for your tenancy.

09.

CHECKLIST.

- Think about location - is it close enough to walk to campus, or close to public transport links?
- Make sure there is enough furniture and that it is in good condition.
- Are the carpets in good condition and properly fitted?
- Ask the current tenants if the heating works well and if they have any issues with the hot water.
- Do you have access to a shed/garage? Is it included? Get it in writing.
- Does it contain gardening equipment that is in good working order? If not, you'll have to source your own.
- Can the property be securely locked? If there was a fire, could you get out of the property?
- Check the roof has no missing slates, no broken gutters, moss or weeds growing out of the gutters.
- Ask existing tenants if all kitchen appliances including the fridge, freezer and cooker are in working order.
- Is the sealant around the bath and shower damaged? Turn on the shower to assess the water pressure and temperature control.
- Ask existing tenants if they've had any plumbing issues.
- Look out for any evidence of damp or mould on walls, ceilings, around windows and on furniture. **AVOID** properties with damp/mould, which there is no short-term cure for.
- **DON'T** pay a holding fee before seeing the contract/tenancy agreement – you can request a free contract check.

10.

BEFORE SIGNING.

>> **YOUR LANDLORD/AGENT SHOULD GIVE YOU:**

- A copy of the government's **How to Rent** guide.
- A Gas Safety Certificate issued within the last year.
- Evidence of an electrical inspection within the last five years.
- Tenancy deposit protection scheme information.
- Energy Performance Certificate.
- Information about who manages the property i.e. if the landlord or agent is responsible for maintenance/repairs.
- Confirmation in writing if your bills are included, either in an email, letter or in your tenancy agreement.

Ask for guidance if you need help checking these documents.

>> YOU SHOULD:

- Check the rules about overnight guests, smoking and pets.
- Check who is responsible for the bills and make sure this information is included in the tenancy agreement.
- Know your **rights and responsibilities regarding fire safety.**
- Check under which circumstances you could leave the tenancy early without still being liable for rent. Usually, you'd have to find a replacement tenant.
- Make sure any other appliances, such as washing machines, are included in the inventory so that the landlord will be responsible for any repairs/replacements necessary.
- Check who owns the property at **landregistry.gov.uk** if you're not using a letting agent. It only costs £3 and will give you peace of mind as you can confirm that the name on the tenancy agreement matches government records.
- Request a free contract check from our Housing Advisor.

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!

12.

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE.

UNFORTUNATELY, WE COME ACROSS A NUMBER OF CASES EVERY YEAR WHERE STUDENTS HAVE BEEN MISTREATED AND TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF IN THE HOUSING MARKET, BUT YOU CAN HELP REDUCE THIS.

- When students use the Advice Centre, they inform our outreach campaigns so we can keep putting out useful information for you.
- Once you are no longer dealing with a landlord or agent, leave a review, good or bad, to inform other students.

13.

USEFUL CONTACTS.

>> **ADVICE CENTRE**

The Advice Centre is a free and independent service for all students here at Royal Holloway, based on the first floor of the Students' Union building. Our friendly, experienced and professional staff will provide a listening ear and offer general and specialist advice. We're here to support you with a whole range of issues, big and small, but if we're not the best people to help you we'll find you the right support.

- You can call the Helpdesk on **01784 276700**
- Email us at **advice@su.rhul.ac.uk**
- Look through our online resources at **su.rhul.ac.uk/advice**

○ >> **HALLS ENQUIRIES**

For halls enquiries, contact the Student Services Centre.

- Call them on **01784 246641**
- Drop them an email at **student-enquiries@royalholloway.ac.uk**

14.

GOOD LUCK!

Looking for housing can be stressful, but we're here for you.

Finding the right housemates or somewhere to live can be a daunting task in a new place. Our top tip is: don't rush into anything, as housing contracts are legally binding.

If you encounter any problems, please get help as soon as possible - looking for housing is complicated and risky, so it's important that you get guidance.

We wish you the best of luck in finding your next home!



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