LOOKING FOR A NEW HOME
Finding where to live can be easy to do if you know where to look but it can also be a stressful experience. It is really important that you don’t rush to sign a contract simply because you are worried that there aren’t enough properties. THERE ARE!

There are more houses than students in the surrounding area - don’t fall into the trap of signing a contract because you feel pressured to do so, or because you feel all the good properties will be gone.

There are online housing guides available through both the University and Guild websites taking you through the process of looking, moving and living in the community. Look out for these resources that you can access all year round!

This guide is brought to you by...

the Student Mentor Scheme and Living, Accommodation Services at the University of Birmingham.

Getting started
Advice from your Welfare and Community Officer
Choosing your new housemates
Housing services and support
Making a property shortlist and going on a viewing
Housing checklist
Costs involved in private renting
Signing your contract
Useful contact details

The Living team is based in University Centre, whilst the Community Living team can be found in Bournbrook Pavilion. Living helps you find accommodation in halls of residence, often in your first year - Community Living is here to help you make the most of your time in the private sector, often in your second year and beyond. Whether it’s when you’re looking for a house, when you move in, or when you’re living in the community, we’re here for you every step of the way.

The Student Mentor Scheme is a team of 14 current students who have been trained to provide free, peer to peer, advice and guidance to students living in University and Partner accommodation. They are available to help you, from when you receive your accommodation offer, to moving in and throughout your time in University accommodation.
Advice from your Welfare and Community Officer

Hi, I’m Millie, your Welfare and Community Officer for the year!

I have been elected by you to fight for the issues that matter to you most, surrounding all things welfare, housing and community. I have recently graduated from the University so, this being my fourth year living in Birmingham, I have valuable insight into how things work around finding a house.

Alongside all of these useful tips from your elected officers, the main point I want to stress is don’t rush to rent! It is easy to get caught up in the rush of people talking about housing viewings and signing contracts, with landlords telling you that all of the good houses are going. However, it’s simply not true. It can feel like everybody has their group together and knows what they’re doing, but trust me, they don’t.

I hope this booklet helps in your search for a house. If you have any worries, questions or problems, please come to my office or drop me a message with any concerns you have - I am very happy to help and I will pop the kettle on for you!

Have fun house hunting!

Email - welfare@guild.bham.ac.uk

Officer top tips

Once you move into your new home, take photos of everything - even things that seem insignificant or just a tiny bit damaged. Hopefully you’ll never need to, but in a dispute at the end of your tenancy, they can be really helpful in ensuring you get your full deposit back.

Joshua Williams, President

Challenge your landlord and feel free to negotiate with the contract if you don’t think it is fair. Just because you are a student, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have the same rights as any other tenant.

Josh Dooler, Sports Officer

Make sure to visit the house beforehand and note any mould/damage etc.

Amanda Setton, Education Officer

Talk to your housemates before moving in and plan. You don’t need four toasters and four kettles. Save the money for things to make your house look nice.

Ryan Ginger, Activities and Employability Officer

Be careful before signing your contract and make sure to get it checked by the Guild or Living if there is anything within it that you aren’t happy with. Above all, do not rush into signing a contract if you don’t feel comfortable with it.

Tobiloba Adeyemi, Postgraduate Officer

Live with friends with similar routines and lifestyles.

Jo Park, International Officer

You have more power than you think you do – use your power to Rent Right!

Millie Gibbins, Welfare and Community Officer

Choosing your new housemates

They say that you only get to know somebody when you live with them… and they couldn’t be more right.

Think about people’s habits, routines and personalities before you decide to move in together. Best friends do not necessarily make the best housemates!

There is no set rule to say that you must live with who you are living with now, so work out how many people you would like to live with and go from there. If you would like a house, these usually have 3 bedrooms or more. Only search for properties that have the right number of rooms for who you want to share with - it may be tempting to get a bigger house if you really love it, but you may have to pay for those extra rooms in addition to your own rent if you can’t find somebody to fill them!

Student Mentor Scheme & Housemate Finder Events

You can access the Student Mentor Scheme for information, guidance and support in a range of areas including:

- Shared living and housing
- Your academic studies
- Settling into University life
- Financial queries
- General wellbeing

Before you start viewing houses, you need to decide who you are going to live with. The Student Mentor Scheme can help you meet like-minded people in a fun and relaxed atmosphere.

You don’t need to worry if you are unsure about who you will live with next year. Don’t rush into any housing decisions and follow our social media to find out about our Housemate Finder Events taking place in Term 1 and 2. These will give you the opportunity to meet other people who are also looking for housemates.

The Student Mentors are trained to provide free, peer to peer advice and guidance to students living in University accommodation. Visit our office, located next to the Duck & Scholar in the Vale Hub or get in touch on the details below. We are available 4-8pm, term time weekdays. Drop in and see us if you have any housing wants or questions – no appointment necessary!
So, you’ve begun your search into the private housing sector. You’re finally going to get your own space, with your chosen group of housemates, living life on your own terms. There are, however, loads of new things to consider, to organise, to overcome, and that’s where Living and Community Living come in.

Useful resources
You can find housing through our search engine, Birmingham Studentpad. We won’t advertise any landlord or agent unless they’ve completed compliance training with the Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme, so you can rent with confidence.

Contract checking
Alongside Guild Advice we can also check your contract for you, so you know exactly what you’re signing up to before you make any legal commitment.

Private sector advice
Not sure where to start house hunting? Fallen out with housemates? Worried about your contractual obligations? Noisy neighbours keeping you up at night? No concern is too big or too small, and it’s always better to come and ask than worry about it, if we can’t help you right there and then, we can put you in touch with somebody who can.

Local and relevant
We’re right here with you, in YOUR community – the Community Living hub is located at Bournbrook Pavilion, only a 2 minute walk from central Selly Oak. Pop in for a chat and a coffee, and access to our expertise. We’ve also got you covered if you’re on campus – just visit the Living shop in University Centre.

Ongoing support
While we’re here to support you if things don’t go to plan, we also know that it’s not all doom and gloom - living in the local community is an incredible opportunity that’s not to be missed! That’s why we run a number of events and initiatives to help you really make the most of your time here.

Community Wardens support students living in the community to enjoy their time in Selly Oak and the wider area, feel proud to be part of the community and get the most out of living there! Community Wardens focus on five areas: community cohesion, student safety, cleaner streets, a greener environment and housing support. We conduct regular patrols to identify issues such as insecure properties and waste problems; respond to issues and complaints raised by students and non-student residents; educate students on crime prevention and housing issues; and run activities to improve the local community such as Junkbusters. We work in partnership with University teams such as Living and Security, West Midlands Police, West Midlands Fire Service and Birmingham City Council to share information and resolve issues affecting students in the community.

Birmingham Studentpad is the official University of Birmingham property search engine aimed at students looking for a house.

Only landlords accredited through the Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme can advertise their properties through this website. Properties include short term and long term leases, many within close proximity to the University.

Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme (MLAS)
We recommend that you always let your new home through a landlord or lettings agent that is accredited by MLAS. This means that they will have been on training and signed a code of conduct which commits them to a number of good practices.

Community Wardens

Lettings Membership Scheme
The University of Birmingham Lettings Membership Scheme (LMS) is new for 2019, and brings together landlords, lettings agents and students to have a positive impact on the private sector housing market. The LMS Charter outlines best practice and ethical standards for landlords and lettings agents – choosing a landlord or lettings agent who has signed the LMS Charter gives you the confidence to Rent Right and have a great experience in your new home.
Making a property shortlist and going on a viewing

Things to think about when making a shortlist:

- Location
- Condition
- Security
- Fire safety
- Gas safety
- Energy performance
- HMO – House of Multiple Occupation
- Marks Out of Tenancy review rating

Location
Make sure you discuss a location that suits you all. Remember being close to the University doesn’t always mean that you are getting the most for your money. Have a look around different areas and think about transport links that can help you get about.

Condition
Keep an eye out for damage to the property, including loose carpet, cracked windows or door frames, damp and mould on the walls or ceilings, and broken furniture. Take pictures of damage or poor conditions and keep these for future reference.

Security
The security of your property should be a priority when choosing a house. Student houses are especially vulnerable to burglary due to the high numbers of valuable items and sometimes poor security. Check the following things:

- Do the doors and windows shut correctly?
- Is there at least one, preferably two secure locks on your front and back door?
- Does the house have a burglar alarm and does it work?
- Is the garden adequately fenced and secured?

Fire safety

- Check the fire alarms; do they work? Are they in the kitchen and communal areas?
- Does the house have fire doors? Fire doors can be identified via a blue ‘fire door’ sticker on them or the fact that they swing shut automatically.
- Is there a quick escape route out of the property?
- Do the plug sockets appear to be safe and working?

As soon as you move into your home it is recommended that you book a free ‘Safe and Well visit’ through West Midlands Fire Service. They will check your home, talk to you about fire safety and also fit free smoke alarms (if required).

Gas safety
It’s the landlord’s responsibility to check your appliances and make sure they are working and safe. You can ask your landlord for a copy of the Gas Safety Certificate before you move in to the property.

Energy performance
The Energy Performance Certificate should be provided free of charge. It is a legal requirement. It will be provided to you at the beginning of the contract period but you can also often find it online when you book to go on a viewing – this way you can estimate whether your future bills will be expensive or more affordable. If you haven’t received it, ask your landlord or letting agent where it is.

HMO – House of Multiple Occupation
Under the Housing Act 2004, from 1 October 2018 any landlord who lets a property to 5 or more people – from 2 or more separate households – must be licensed by their local housing authority. A HMO is classed as a property that is more at risk. Therefore the landlord has extra legal responsibilities to fulfil. This would mean the landlord applying to Birmingham City Council to ensure the safety of the home before renting it out to occupants.

If you decide to live in a HMO property, then by law there should be some contact information clearly on display once you’ve moved in. This will detail the name of the HMO Manager (typically the landlord or agent), a phone number and address.

Marks Out of Tenancy review rating
Reviews left by previous tenants are invaluable information for your house search. It is always worth checking whether the property you are going to visit has been reviewed on Marks Out Of Tenancy and how it has been rated. Previous tenants might be able to share information that you would not find out from the landlord or viewing!

For more information about this service and to book an appointment, please email: contact.centre@wmfs.net
visit: wmfs.net
or call: 0800 389 5525

To check the energy performance for the property you want to view, visit: epcregister.com

Contact Centre
0800 389 5525
visit: wmfs.net
email: contact.centre@wmfs.net

marksoutoftenancy.com
# Housing checklist

## Address

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<tr>
<th>House 1</th>
<th>House 2</th>
<th>House 3</th>
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## Notes:

### General

**Essential**

- MLAS accredited landlord
- HMO licence [property with 5+ people with shared facilities]
- Smoke alarms [non-HMO minimum of 1 per floor/ HMO more specific fire safety requirements]
- Up to date Gas Safety Certificate
- Up to date Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)
- Electric meter [with access to read]
- Up to date PAT [portable appliance test] on portable appliances
- Heater timer
- Burglar alarm
- Internal window locks
- Central heating
- Secure front door [Wood: preferably with a separate mortise lock, UPVC: try lock to make sure it is secure]
- Secure back door [providing adequate security with an easy to use lock]

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<th>House 1</th>
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## House 1

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<tr>
<th>Kitchen</th>
<th>Essential</th>
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<td>Washing machine</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 cupboard per person (storage)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire blanket/Extinguisher</td>
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## Outside

**Essential**

- Lockable gated alleyway [if there is a side gate]
- Adequate fences, not broken [if there is a garden]
- External lighting/security lighting
- Area to store rubbish/recycling

<table>
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## House 2

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**Bathroom/s**

**Essential**

- Bathroom/Ensuite
- Shower [over bath/cubicle]/Bath
- Toilet
- Sink
- Mirror

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**Desirable**

- Ensuite
- Curtains/Blinds

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</table>
### Living Area

**Essential**
- Sofa (enough space for everyone?)
- Internet access (cable or phone point)
- Curtains/Blinds

**Desirable**
- Coffee table
- TV
- Sky/Cable TV point
- Dining table
- Dining chairs
- Storage space

### Bedroom

**Essential**
- Single/double bed
- Desk
- Desk chair
- Wardrobe
- Chest of drawers
- Curtains/Blinds
- Plug sockets (check there are enough!)

**Desirable**
- TV
- Storage cupboard/shelving/bookcase
- Bedside table/cabinet
- Sky/Cable TV point

### Questions for current tenants

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<th>Question</th>
<th>House 1</th>
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<th>Additional comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Have you been happy living here?</td>
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<td>Would you recommend the property?</td>
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<td>Do you feel that you have a good landlord?</td>
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<td>Do they respond quickly to queries/maintenance issues?</td>
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<td>Is it easy to get in touch with them?</td>
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<td>Do they give you notice (at least 24 hours) before they enter the property for any reason?</td>
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<td>Can you give me an idea of how much the bills will be?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you feel safe living here?</td>
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Costs involved in private renting

Rent

Rental figures in Selly Oak are typically between £75 - £140 per person per week. You will find that rent varies depending on the finish, size, and location of the property – for example, the houses closer to the University tend to be more expensive. Your rent will be agreed in your contract and you will be asked to pay your rent by standing order – this means that you have to manually set up a regular payment to the letting agent’s or landlord’s chosen bank account.

Do also remember that contracts normally start from the 1st July, therefore even though you don’t plan to move in until September you are likely to be liable for rent over the summer period.

A common mistake is to multiply the weekly rent advertised by four to calculate the monthly payment. That can make monthly rent seem more affordable, but remember only one month of the year (February) has four weeks in it, the rest have more. To get an accurate monthly figure, multiply a week’s rent by 52 and divide by 12. On a property costing £100 a week, this makes the rent £434 a month – not £400.

Deposits

The deposit, a maximum of 5 weeks’ rent, is paid to the landlord or letting agent to provide them with security against any damage that you may cause in the property or unpaid rent during your tenancy.

Make sure you budget for the deposit at the time of contract signing as it is a considerable sum of money.

Whenever you pay a deposit for an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (you may see this abbreviated to ‘AST’ – this is the most common student tenancy), the landlord or letting agent must protect your deposit by paying it into one of three government authorised tenancy deposit schemes:

- Deposit Protection Service
- MyDeposits
- Tenancy Deposit Scheme

Your landlord or letting agent must put your deposit in the scheme within 30 days of getting it, and must provide you with details of where they have protected your deposit, including:

- A certificate as proof that your money has been paid into one of the schemes
- Information on how to apply for release of the deposit
- The purpose of the deposit and what to do if there is a dispute

If you do not receive confirmation of where your deposit has been paid or you are unsure about the deposit amount, please contact Guild Advice or Living for advice.

Tenancy deposit schemes make sure you’ll get your deposit back if you:

- meet the terms of your tenancy agreement
- don’t damage the property
- pay your rent and bills

Hidden costs

Before taking a property, think carefully about your budget and how much you can afford to spend. As well as the rent and deposit, you will have to think about the cost of bills, food and other living costs.

Since 1 June 2019, most fees charged by landlords and agents are banned. This ban covers assured shorthold tenancies and student housing. You can now only be charged fees in the following situations:

- Late payment of rent
- Lost keys or fobs
- Ending your tenancy early
- Changing your tenancy
- Renewing your tenancy – if you signed a tenancy agreement before 1 June 2019 which says you have to pay a renewal fee

You can’t be charged for:

- Referencing
- Administration
- Credit and immigration checks

Always ask for advice if you are unsure about additional charges.
Signing your contract

When you think you’ve found the right house, it may be tempting to sign the contract (also known as a tenancy agreement) immediately so you don’t lose the property. However, once you have entered into a contract you will be legally bound to it. It is too late to make changes, cancel the contract or get your deposit back if you change your mind. Once it is signed, you cannot go back, so make sure you don’t rush into signing anything.

Any reputable landlord or letting agent will allow you to take the contract away to read and understand for 24 hours – so bring it to Guild Advice or Living and get it checked for free before you sign. Contracts are usually long and complex documents full of legal jargon that you may not fully understand - we strongly recommend that students get their contract checked.

Guarantor

When signing a contract, it is likely that you will be asked to provide a guarantor based in the UK who can guarantee the rent payment if you are unable to pay.

Usually this will be a parent or guardian, but if you are unable to provide a UK-based guarantor then there are also guarantor companies who can act as a guarantor for a fee.

Some letting agents and landlords may let you pay more of the rent money upfront – but before you pay any extra money over, or if you have any concerns or questions about guarantors, please get in touch with Guild Advice or Living for information and support.

Right To Rent checks

Landlords are prohibited, by law, from letting a property to an individual who does not have the right to remain in the UK for the duration of their tenancy.

- International students: you will need to secure your immigration status in order to secure a tenancy.
- UK and EU students: be prepared to show proof of your right to rent property in the UK, for example a passport.

Negotiating your contract

If you have noticed issues with the property on your viewing, you may be able to negotiate certain improvements into your contract. For example, you could say to your landlord that you will sign the contract, but only if they stipulate in the contract that they will put locks on each bedroom door before you move in. Remember, if you don’t ask, you don’t get!
Useful contact details

Hopefully this guide gives you the information you need to start looking for a new home, but always make sure you are as prepared as possible before signing up to anything. You really don’t need to rush the house hunting process and it is important to take your time and make sure you are 100% happy with the decisions you are making. It can be difficult to step back and take your time when the pressure is on but remember - you are in control!

Guild Advice
Visit - Ground Floor, Guild of Students
Drop-in - 12-2pm, Monday-Friday
Call - 0121 415 8965
Email - guildadvice@guild.bham.ac.uk
Online - guildofstudents.com/guildadvice

Community Living
Visit - Community Living Hub, Bournbrook Pavilion
Call - 0121 414 5376
Email - communityliving@contact.bham.ac.uk
Online - community-living.org.uk

Community Wardens
Visit - Ground Floor, Guild of Students
Call - 0121 415 8968
Email - community@guild.bham.ac.uk
Online - guildofstudents.com/community-wardens

Midlands Landlord Accreditation Scheme
Call - 0121 288 2008
Email - talk@mlas.org.uk
Online - mlas.org.uk

Student Mentor Scheme
Visit - Office in Vale Hub, next to Duck & Scholar
Drop-in - 4-8pm, term time weekdays
Call - 0121 415 8568
Email - mentorwelfare@guild.bham.ac.uk
Online - guildofstudents.com/studentmentors

Living
Visit - Ground Floor, University Centre
Drop-in - 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday
Call - 0121 414 8000
Email - living@contacts.bham.ac.uk
Online - birminghamstudentpad.co.uk
This booklet is part of Rent Right, a joint campaign between the Guild of Students and the University to empower students to make the best house hunting decisions during your time at Birmingham. Rent Right is about more than just looking for a house – it’s about providing knowledge, support, and confidence at every stage of your time in the private housing sector.