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# DON'T TAKE A CHANCE ON HOUSING

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

**Student  
Mentor  
Scheme**  
Advice  
& Guidance

Your  
Students' Union  
University of Birmingham  
guild of students

CHANCE 	[Blue diagonal stripes] ALTON ROAD AA100	UNIVERSITY STATION  AA200	COUNCIL TAX  PAY AA200	[Red diagonal stripes] PERSHORE ROAD AA60
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## Some words and advice from your Housing & Community Officer, Izzie Nicholds

From personal experience, I know that finding the perfect house can be an intimidating process. By 3rd year, everyone seems to have the gift of the gab when it comes to housing. But, whether you do or don't know what you're looking for, you can be sure to find your dream pad that fits within the budget for you and your mates!

So without further a due, here are some top tips to remember when perusing the streets of Selly...

- Pick wisely when it comes to housemates, after all you are spending the whole year with them and you don't want a ruined living experience because of that.
- Don't rush the process! There are plenty of houses to go round so you might as well take your time. Just because a friend of a friend of a friend has got theirs sorted, doesn't mean you have missed out. Don't settle for second best - because if a house doesn't fit your exact criteria, you're well within your rights to keep looking! Just because the landlord tells you about the inclusive enormous smart TV, mood lighting and free Wi-Fi, it doesn't mean you should sign the contract there and then. In fact, we would always recommend that you get your contract checked before signing; you can do this through Guild Advice or Living (contact details can be found at the back of this booklet).

- Check for the essentials like fire alarms, good security and an operative boiler – these are super important and shouldn't be overlooked when picking a house.

At the Guild, there are a load of services that can further advise you on your journey into the housing market. We have Guild Lettings, our very own letting agent located in the University Centre. Guild Advice also provides a contract-checking service, as do Living; and along with the Student Mentors; they are here to support you. So don't hesitate to use them!

Read this booklet cover to cover like your favourite Harry Potter book (or something more grown-up?!). Don't forget to come to our Monopoly – themed '**House Hunting Information Day**' on 2nd November, 10am-3pm in the Guild Underground, accompanied by food stalls and great music, to learn everything you need to know about house hunting. Then on Monday 14th November we will be holding our first of four '**Housemate Finder**' events, helping you to find a like-minded person or group to live with if you haven't already; again this takes place in The Guild Underground from 6-8pm. Then on Wednesday 16th November, our very own **Guild Lettings** are holding a '**Housing Fair**' in the Amos Room from 11am-4pm, with a further '**Living Housing Fair**' taking place on Friday 18th November, 11am-3pm in the Great Hall in the Aston Webb building.

Once you've gone to the events, I'd like to hope that looking for a house is no more than a breeze. In the spirit of Monopoly's own Uncle Pennybags, don't take a chance on housing!

Izzie Nicholds,  
Housing and Community Officer  
(2016-2017)

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### Student Mentor Scheme

The Student Mentor Scheme supports students living in university accommodation and provides information and guidance on a range of problems including: shared living and accommodation related issues, finance related issues, issues relating to academic study and issues with your general wellbeing. The Student Mentors and support staff will be happy to offer support and answer any questions you may have concerning house hunting.

Visit: **in the Hub, Vale (next to the Duck and Scholar), 4-8pm, Monday – Friday, during term time.**

Call: **0121 415 8568**

Email: **mentorwelfare@guild.bham.ac.uk**

Online: **guildofstudents.com/support/studentmentors**

'Like' us on: **facebook.com/studentmentorscheme**

Follow us on Twitter: **@StudentMentors1**

## STEP 1:

# COME ALONG TO OUR HOUSE HUNTING INFORMATION DAY

**Date: Wednesday 2nd November 2016**

**Place: Underground, Guild of Students**

**Time: 10am-3pm**

Our House Hunting Information Day is your opportunity to find out everything you need to know about looking for a house. A number of services will be present at the event, including:

### Stall: Guild Advice

**How they can help you today:**

Guild Advice are able to provide useful information for when you start looking for private rented accommodation and how to deal with issues that may arise both in university and private rented accommodation alike.

**Contact Information:**

email: [guildadvice@guild.bham.ac.uk](mailto:guildadvice@guild.bham.ac.uk)



### Stall: Community Warden Scheme

**How they can help you today:**

The Community Wardens can provide advice concerning safety both within your property and whilst living in the community, waste disposal and recycling advice (including when your bin day will be, how to recycle, and how to deal with bulky waste), information on some of the 'Green' projects we are currently working on (including our wild flower planning initiatives) and housing advice should you have any concerns around housing, HMO licensing and being Gas Safe.

**Contact Information:**

email: [community@guild.bham.ac.uk](mailto:community@guild.bham.ac.uk)

### Stall: Guild Lettings

**How they can help you today:**

You will be able to preview a selection of Guild Lettings finest properties and find out about private rented accommodation. We will take you through the lettings process, answer questions and provide general information and offer advice. There will also be the opportunity for you to make a list of requirements so we can help you select the most suitable properties for you to view.

**Contact Information:**

email: [guildlettings@guild.bham.ac.uk](mailto:guildlettings@guild.bham.ac.uk) or visit us online at [www.guildlettingsbirmingham.co.uk](http://www.guildlettingsbirmingham.co.uk)

### Stall: Living, Accommodation Services

**How they can help you today:**

'Birmingham Studentpad' is the university's private sector search engine. You can use this service to help you find accommodation for the next academic year with landlords accredited with the Midland Landlord Accredited Scheme (MLAS). Along with the search engine you can register for alerts when new properties are added and also search for house mates via the Message Board. Living are here to help with all aspects of your private sector accommodation from searching, to living in the community. They also offer community advice and a contract reviewing service where no appointment is required. Visit our website at [www.birminghamstudentpad.co.uk](http://www.birminghamstudentpad.co.uk)

**Contact Information:**

email: [living@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:living@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

### Stall: West Midlands Fire Service

**How can they help you today:**

Firefighters from the local fire station will be on hand to answer any questions you may have around fire safety and how to stay safe. They will also be able to signpost you to where to get a 'Safe and Well Check' once in your new home.

**Contact information:**

visit: [www.wmfs.net](http://www.wmfs.net)

### Stall: West Midlands Police (Selly Oak)

**How they can help you today:**

If you have questions about living in Selly Oak around crime/safety or any rumours you might have heard, then come and speak to us.

**Contact information:**

email: [sellyoak@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk](mailto:sellyoak@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk) or 'follow' us on Twitter: [@sellyoakpolice](https://twitter.com/sellyoakpolice)

### What if I can't make the House Hunting Information Day?

If you are unable to make the 'House Hunting Information Day' then don't worry, as on the evening of the 2nd November Izzie will also be visiting Pritchatts Park (Leo's Bar 6-7pm) and the Vale (7:30-8:30pm) to present housing talks to any students who weren't able to come along to the information day. You can also access Izzie's housing talk online at [www.guildofstudents.com/support/studentmentors](http://www.guildofstudents.com/support/studentmentors). Finally, in addition, the contact details of all the services present at the House Hunting Information Day can be found towards the end of this booklet.

## STEP 2:

# WHO DO YOU WANT TO LIVE WITH?



Before you start viewing houses, you need to make one of the most important decisions yet... **who are you going to live with?**

There is a well-known saying 'you only truly get to know someone when you live with them'. It helps if you know people's habits, hobbies, routines and personalities before you think about moving in together. Best friends do not necessarily make the best housemates, so be honest with each other. There is no set rule to say that you must live with who you are living with now.



If you are still looking to meet people to live with next year, come along to one of our **'Housemate Finder' events**.

The Student Mentor Scheme can help you meet some likeminded people in the same situation. The **first event** takes place on **Monday 14th November, 6-8pm in the Guild Underground**, but to find out when the rest of our 'Housemate Finder' events are taking place, please check out our timetable of events located on the back cover of this guide.



## STEP 3:

# BUDGETING FOR YOUR HOUSE

### Deposits

Since the 6th April 2007, whenever you pay a deposit for an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST – the most common private tenancy), the landlord/letting agent must protect your deposit by paying it into one of four government authorised tenancy deposit schemes. Paying into a Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS) will ensure that you get your deposit back when you are entitled to it and that any disputes which do arise about the deposit, are easier to resolve.

The deposit, typically 4-6 weeks rent, is paid to the landlord or agent to provide them with security against any damage that you may cause in the property or rent arrears during your tenancy. The deposit is normally paid when you sign your contract – so make sure you budget for this as it is a considerable sum of money.

If you are an international student then you may have to pay a higher deposit of around 8 weeks or 2 months' rent. This is because the vast majority of international students will not be able to get a guarantor to underwrite their rent payments and their liabilities under the tenancy agreement.

The next obvious question is "What's a Guarantor?!" – For many students this will be a parent, and basically they will agree to cover your costs in relation to the property if you can't. The important things to remember are

that the guarantor should normally be someone that lives in the UK, that they have understood what is expected of them in any "guarantee agreement" they are asked to sign, and that they only guarantee your share of the rent (and obligations).

Obviously, for many international students it may be impossible to get a guarantor, and for some home students too, so you are going to have to consider the state of your budgets! If you are asked for more than 2 months' rent, you need to consider why that might be!

If you are unsure about guarantors or higher deposit requirements, then it is advisable to seek advice from Guild Advice or Living.



When you pay your deposit make sure you get a receipt. Within 30 days of paying your deposit, your landlord or agent must provide you with details of where they have protected your deposit, including:

- A Certificate, with contact details of the relevant TDS & landlord/letting agent 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 into, or if the deposit amount you have been requested to pay seems unusually high, please seek advice from Guild Advice or Living. We always recommend that you seek advice and get any questions answered before you sign your contract.

### Hidden costs

In addition to your deposit be mindful that there may be some additional admin fees (around £50) and holding charges depending on who you let your house with. You're sometimes not made aware of these in advance so it's wise to ask the landlord/agent about any hidden costs/fees before signing your contract. Guild Lettings offer a service where you will not pay any additional fees on top of your deposit.

### Rent

Rental figures for properties vary from £55 – £120pppw, with the average rent around £80pppw. However, you may find that rent varies not just on quality but also on location (possibly increasing the closer the house is to the university). Your rent will be stipulated in your contract and the best method of paying your rent is by monthly standing order.

As you are likely to pay your rent monthly, it is important to calculate exactly how much you will be paying each month. This can be done by doing the following calculation:

$$\frac{\text{Weekly rent} \times 52}{12\text{months}} \quad \text{Here's an example:} \quad \frac{\pounds 65 \times 52}{12} = \pounds 281.66$$

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

It is also advisable to remember that contracts normally start from the 1st July, therefore even though you don't plan to live there until September you will be liable for rent over the summer period. Remember to build this into your budget. Also think about the cost of the deposit – read on for more information about deposits.

If you take on the property and then for any reason your rent is late, you can incur charges from your landlord/letting agent. If you fall into arrears, you may become liable for eviction.

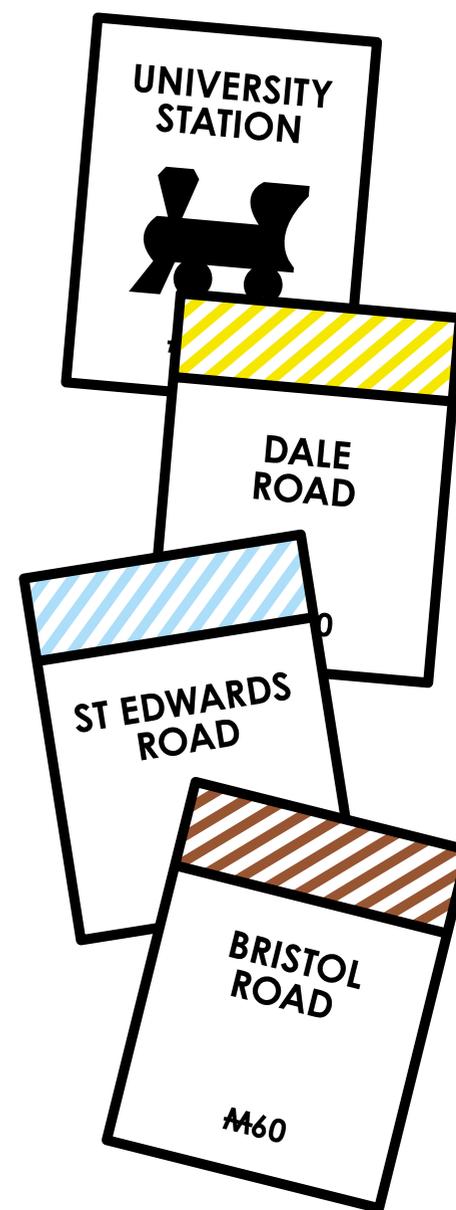
Never withhold rent, whether you are unhappy in your property or struggling with your finances. In these circumstances it is advisable to seek advice from Guild Advice or Living.

### Utility bills

These range from £8-16pppw and depend on what is included and the number of people in the property. Utility bills to consider include: gas, electric, water, internet and TV licence. Some bills can be included in the rent. In addition students need to apply for Council Tax exemption and this can be done in Library Services or directly with Birmingham City Council. Normally the gas and electric will be set up with a provider, but it is possible to switch energy providers if you wish, however just speak to your agent/landlord for advice as some landlords prefer for you to stay with one provider.



**Make sure you set up your utilities and budget for them accordingly!**





## STEP 4:

# WHAT TYPE OF HOUSE ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

When your group is deciding upon the type of property they would like to rent, there are a number of important aspects to consider; such as price, location, property size (for example, number of bedrooms, bathrooms).

### Location

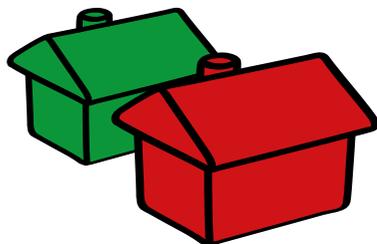
The main student areas are Selly Oak and Harborne. However students are also known to reside in Selly Park, Edgbaston, the City Centre and Moseley.

Community Wardens work within the community and aim to encourage all residents to get involved in, look after and feel proud of their local community.

### Property features

When you are looking for a house, don't just focus on your **WANTS**, you have to consider your **NEEDS**. Don't pick a house that has a double bed, but as a consequence has very little study space or unsecure windows and doors. Don't focus on your desire to pick a house with a garden and then ignore the current tenants warning about its lack of energy efficiency as it will cost you more in bills - think carefully about the choices you make.

In this booklet you will find a 'Property Viewings Checklist'. This is for you to carry with you when you are viewing properties. We have broken the list down into 'essential' and 'desirable' items to help guide you with what you really should, and perhaps shouldn't be looking for.



### Community Warden Scheme

Community Wardens are students from the University of Birmingham who are trained to provide you with information, direction, advice and the contacts you need to deal with issues in the community.

Visit: **Ground Floor, Guild of Students (ask at Guild Advice)**

Call: **0121 251 2502**

Email: **community@guild.bham.ac.uk**

Online: **www.guildofstudents.com/community**

'Like' us on: **www.facebook.com/ilovesellyoak**

Follow us on Twitter: **@ilovesellyoak**



### Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing

Under the Housing Act 2004, any property housing five or more unrelated individuals over three stories with shared facilities is classed as 'a property more at risk'. Therefore the landlord has extra legal responsibilities to fulfil, including applying for a license from Birmingham City Council to ensure the safety of occupants before the landlord looks to rent it to you.

If you are sharing with five or more people and the house meets this criteria, you must ensure your landlord has a HMO license for the house before you think about signing the contract – if it doesn't have a license then not only could you be at risk, your landlord is also breaking the law. You can check whether the property

is licensed by asking your landlord/ letting agent, or by emailing the Community Wardens – community@guild.bham.ac.uk or calling 0121 251 2502. Community Wardens have access to the database of HMO properties and can therefore confirm whether or not your house is safe.

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

If your property does require a HMO license, then we strongly recommend that you see a copy of the license before signing for the property. If you cannot be shown the HMO license then don't sign a contract!



## STEP 5: SEARCHING FOR ACCOMMODATION

### Take your time...

Don't rush to sign a contract simply because you are worried that there aren't enough properties. There are more available houses than there are students to fill them in Selly Oak and the surrounding areas! It is important to take your time to find the right house, and get all the information you need before you start looking.

Before you think about finding a property, come along to our **House Hunting Information Day** to find out everything you need to know about house hunting before you start looking! Get yourself along to the **Guild Lettings Housing Fair** too, to see a selection of houses for rent. If you don't find a house at this fair then there is an additional **Living Housing Fair** too a couple of days later. For dates, locations and times for all events please see the back cover of this booklet.



living

For students who do not wish to move into private accommodation next year, then there is the option to return to live in university accommodation. You can apply to live in any of our university accommodation sites from **December 1st 2016** at [www.birmingham.ac.uk/accommodation/apply](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/accommodation/apply). The application deadline is **January 22nd 2017**.

### How to find a house...

Although it is tempting to head out into the local area and visit the vast array of agents, it is important to take time to attend the events we have set up for you throughout the housing season. Never go door knocking looking for a house, get the knowledge first and follow the right steps and you should be just fine!

### Living and Guild Lettings

Living, the university's accommodation service, and Guild Lettings, the Guild of Students' lettings service share an office in University Centre to help students find the right accommodation from the moment they arrive in Birmingham, all the way through until their final year.

### Guild Lettings

Guild Lettings are the first point of call for students searching for private rented accommodation and can also offer you practical advice to help you find the right property.

- **No** fees for students! This can save you up to £100 per person.
- MLAS accredited landlords only
- Friendly student staff
- High quality accommodation
- Extensive knowledge and experience

### Living

Living, the university's accommodation service, offers support and advice for students in both university and private accommodation.

#### For students wanting to move into the private sector:

Living, the university's accommodation provider, hosts the official University of Birmingham private sector housing search engine via [www.birminghamstudentpad.co.uk](http://www.birminghamstudentpad.co.uk). Living can help you find the best house for your needs and give you peace of mind by only advertising properties from MLAS accredited landlords.

#### Contract reviewing service and advice:

Living can review any contract for private sector housing, and will explain any parts you don't understand, before you decide to sign. We are also able to help with advice and information should you have any problems with your letting agent or landlord, or with any aspect of living in the community, all throughout your time at Birmingham.

#### Online House Hunting Guide:

Living has put together an interactive House Hunting Guide for students looking to move into private sector accommodation. The guide covers all you need to know about finding a house, tenancy agreements and overcoming any house hunting challenges you may face. The guide is available on the Accommodation Portal: <https://studentaccommodation.bham.ac.uk/StarRezPortal/Default.aspx>

#### Guild Lettings Housing Fair:

Wednesday 16th November, 11am-4pm, Amos room at the Guild of Students

At this event you will be able to preview a selection of Guild Lettings finest properties and find out about private rented accommodation. We will take you through the lettings process, answer questions and provide general information and offer advice. There will also be the opportunity for you to make a list of requirements so we can help you select the most suitable properties for you to view.

#### Living's Housing Fair:

Friday 18th November 2016, 11am-3pm, Great Hall, Aston Webb

Living can help you with private sector advice and assistance with your search for that all important accommodation. There will be landlords and agents accredited with the Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme (MLAS) along with private providers, all attending to give you the best possible opportunity to research all options before making the final decision on where to live.

## Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme (MLAS)

An accredited landlord/letting agent has signed a code of conduct which commits them to a number of good practices, for example, attending to repairs and defects promptly. Before you consider renting from a landlord/agent ALWAYS ask 'is the landlord accredited?' - This will be the best indication of whether you are signing a contract with a good landlord.

If you are letting through an agent you may be told they are an 'accredited agent', but this doesn't necessarily mean that the landlord of the property you are viewing through them is MLAS accredited. The agency accreditation simply means that the agent will have to abide by a code of conduct, but this doesn't mean that the landlord does! This is especially important if it's the landlord managing your tenancy once you have moved in and not the agent (e.g. the one you call for repairs or problems during the tenancy).

To find out more about MLAS and to check whether a landlord/letting agent is accredited, please go to [www.mlas.org.uk](http://www.mlas.org.uk) and if a landlord or agent isn't accredited, ask yourself why that might be!

## Information for international students ONLY – The Immigration Act 2014

A new requirement for private landlords was introduced in 2014. This stops landlords from letting a property to an individual who does not have the right to remain in the UK for the duration of their tenancy. You will need to prove your immigration status in order to secure a tenancy. For more information and to understand whether this may apply to you please visit [www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-rent-landlords-code-of-practice](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-rent-landlords-code-of-practice) or alternatively call 03000 069 9799. In addition, visit Guild Advice in the Guild of Students to seek further advice.



## STEP 6:

# GO ON VIEWINGS TO FIND THE RIGHT PROPERTY

When you are viewing a property, there are a few important factors to consider that could help you to determine whether the house is right for you.

It is a good idea to ask the current tenants about their experience of living in the house; for instance do they recommend the property? Their answers will be a good indication of whether or not you are likely to have problems with the house, landlord or letting agent. In addition, it may also be a good idea to ask the current tenants about the cost of utility bills to give a good indication of what your potential running expenses might be. Page 20 provides a list of further questions you may want to ask the current tenants.

## Security

Security should be a priority when choosing a house. Student's properties are especially vulnerable to burglary due to the high number of valuable items and sometimes poor security provision. Think about: 5 occupants = 5 laptops/computers + 5 phones!

Think when you are viewing the property:

- Does the side gate lock and are keys available?
- Is the rear garden fence in a good state of repair?
- How secure is the front door and back door? If it is wooden, does it have a second lock?
- Does the house have a burglar alarm and do you know how it works?
- How do you feel in the area? Have you checked what it is like at night? Would you feel comfortable being home alone?

Check out [www.lovesellyoak.com](http://www.lovesellyoak.com) for further information

Finally, make sure the property is in good condition. If any big repairs are needed or if it has damp, then don't sign a contract for the property until you've got these issues checked out!

## Gas Safety

Being a tenant means there's always a landlord responsible for the safety of the gas appliances.

Gas safety checks must be carried out annually by a qualified Gas Engineer, who must be registered on the Gas Safe Register.

Once the Gas Engineer has carried out the necessary checks and has agreed that the appliances are safe to use, they will then issue a Gas Safety Certificate.

A landlord/agent must supply you with an up to date Gas Safety Certificate, as proof that all safety checks have been carried out – you must ask to see this certificate before you sign a contract. If you don't, then you could well be putting yourself in danger and at worst, be at risk of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning. If you wish to check whether a property is Gas Safe Registered then please visit [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk).

## Fire Safety

When viewing a property, it is important to think about fire safety. THINK - How safe would you be if there was a fire?

- Make sure that fire alarms have been fitted throughout the property and that they are not covered or obstructed in any way. Do they work? Don't be afraid to test them.
- Are there fire doors within the property? Fire doors slow the progress of a fire and they close automatically to ensure safety. Also, should you be in the house when a fire starts, they will allow you extra time to get help.

- Is there a quick escape route to get out of the property? Escape routes should be clear and free from obstruction.
- Do the plug sockets appear to be safe and working? Loose or overloaded plug sockets are a fire hazard. Make sure there are an adequate amount of plug sockets in each room to minimize the need to use an extension lead.

As soon as you move in to a new property it is recommended that you book a free 'home safety check' through West Midlands Fire Service. They will check your home, talk to you about fire safety and also fit free smoke alarms (if required). For more information about this service and to book an appointment, please email: [contact.centre@wmfs.net](mailto:contact.centre@wmfs.net) or call: 0800 389 5525. For more information about West Midlands Fire Service in general, please go to [www.wmfs.net](http://www.wmfs.net).

## Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

All students renting a private property should either be provided with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) or should be given a way of accessing this electronically. The EPC must be provided free of charge.

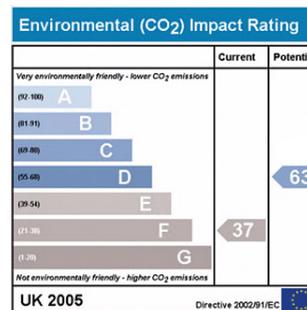
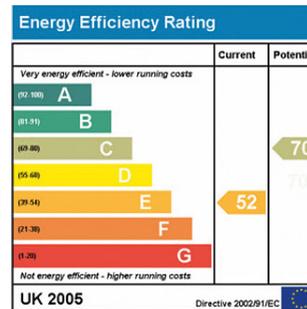
The purpose of the Energy Performance Certificate is to show you the energy performance of the property you are planning to rent.

The EPC shows the energy efficiency rating (relating to running costs) and the Environmental Impact rating (relating to CO2 emissions) of the property. They are shown on an A – G rating scale similar to those used for fridges and other electrical appliances.

The certificate is accompanied by a recommendation report that contains recommendations on how to improve the property's energy efficiency. However, there is no statutory requirement for the landlord to carry out any of the recommended measures.

It is worth asking about the EPC before signing a contract. If the property falls into a low category, for example F-G, then it may turn out to be expensive to heat and therefore your energy bills may be high.

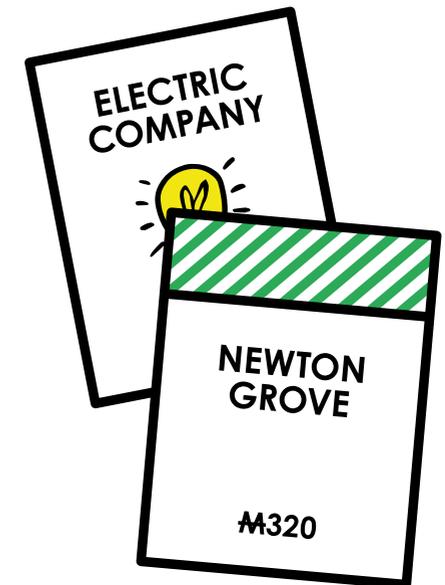
This is what an Energy Efficiency rating chart and Environmental Impact rating chart look like:



For more information about EPCs, please visit the Guild Lettings website <http://www.guildlettingsbirmingham.co.uk/EPCs.wiki>

## StudentBricks

StudentBricks is a property review site set up for the benefit of the University of Birmingham housing market. Our main purpose is to allow students to check reviews from previous tenants before signing for a house. Over the last 12 months students have been sharing their experiences with us in order to help future tenants find the best home away from home. Once you have viewed your house through Guild Lettings, go to [www.studentbricks.co.uk](http://www.studentbricks.co.uk) and check previous tenant's reviews in order to validate your decision.



# HOUSING CHECKLIST

ESSENTIAL - GENERAL	HOUSE		
	1	2	3
Accredited landlord			
HMO licence (property with 5+ people over 3+ stories, with shared facilities)			
Smoke alarms (none 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)			
Electric storage heating (if not gas)			
Up to date PAT on portable appliances			
Heater timer			
Burglar alarm			
Internal window locks			
Central heating			
DESIRABLE - GENERAL	1	2	3
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)			

ESSENTIAL - OUTSIDE	HOUSE		
	1	2	3
Lockable gated alleyway (if there is side gate)			
Adequate fences, not broken (if there is a garden)			
External lighting/security lighting			
Area to store rubbish/recycling			
DESIRABLE - OUTSIDE	1	2	3
Garden/s			
Clear maintained outside space (if no garden)			
Side gate/entrance			
Lawn mower (if there is a garden - check who is responsible for maintaining it)			
Gardening tools (if there is a garden - check who is responsible for maintaining it within your Tenancy Agreement)			
Own parking space (if you have a car)			
Shed			
Bike storage (if you have a bike)			

ESSENTIAL - KITCHEN	HOUSE		
	1	2	3
Cooker			
Fridge			
Freezer			
Washing machine			
1 cupboard per person (storage)			
Fire blanket/Extinguisher			
DESIRABLE - KITCHEN	1	2	3
Tumble drier			
Dishwasher			
Kitchen bin			
Microwave			
Toaster			
Kettle			
Curtains/Blinds			

ESSENTIAL - BEDROOM	HOUSE		
	1	2	3
Single/double bed			
Desk			
Desk chair			
Wardrobe			
Chest of drawers			
Curtains/Blinds			
DESIRABLE - BEDROOM	1	2	3
TV			
Storage cupboard/shelving/bookcase			
Bedside table/cabinet			
Sky/Cable TV point			
Plug sockets (check there are enough!)			

ESSENTIAL - LIVING AREA	HOUSE		
	1	2	3
Sofa (enough space for everyone?)			
Internet access (cable or phone point)			
Curtains/Blinds			
Fire blanket/Extinguisher			
DESIRABLE - LIVING AREA	1	2	3
Coffee table			
TV			
Sky/Cable TV point			
Dining table			
Dining chairs			
Storage space			

ESSENTIAL - BATHROOM/S	HOUSE		
	1	2	3
Bathroom/Ensuite			
Shower (over bath/cubicle)/Bath			
Toilet			
Sink			
DESIRABLE - BATHROOM/S	1	2	3
Ensuite			
Mirror			
Curtains/Blinds			

NOTES:

QUESTIONS FOR CURRENT TENANTS	HOUSE		
	1	2	3
Have you been happy living here?			
Additional comments			
Would you recommend the property?			
Additional comments			
Do you feel that you have a good landlord?			
Additional comments			
Do they respond quickly to queries/maintenance issues?			
Additional comments			
Is it easy to get in touch with them?			
Additional comments			
Do they give you notice (at least 24 hours) before they enter the property for any reason?			
Additional comments			
Can you give me an idea of how much the bills will be?			
Additional comments			
Do you feel safe living here?			
Additional comments			



## STEP 7:

# GET YOUR CONTRACT CHECKED

When you think you've found the right house, it may be tempting to sign the contract 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.**



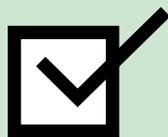
Contracts are usually long, complex and arduous documents that you may not fully understand; therefore you may not know what you are agreeing to!

The Guild and the university have an approved Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) agreement, which can be found on the Guild's website, under Guild Advice housing section. It is a good idea to take a look at this and familiarize yourself with its contents. Not only because many landlords in the local area use these, but also it will give you a good idea of what a standard contract should look like.

Please note; while this is the endorsed contract for use with University of Birmingham students, we recommend that students get their contract checked before signing so that they can understand their rights and responsibilities as good tenants and check any additional terms included.

It is important to understand what you are signing before you sign, as you may be subject to legal action or need to take legal action at a later date, which can be both stressful and costly.

## DO NOT SIGN A CONTRACT UNTIL:



- You have had your **contract checked** by Guild Advice (located on the ground floor of the Guild), or **Living** (University Centre). Both places have professional advisors, staff or volunteers that are able to check your contract;
- You are sure that you want to stay in the property for the term of the contract and can afford to pay for the rent throughout the whole of that period;
- You have seen the exact property you will be living in. If the landlord/letting agent says 'it's the same as this one', but shows you a different property, then DON'T sign;
- You are happy with the group of people you have chosen to live with. Most student tenancies are 'joint', which means you are **jointly liable for the total cost of living in the property**. This is especially important to understand if things were to go wrong;
- Everything you have talked about with an agent/landlord is written into the contract. For example, it is not unheard of for a landlord to promise that 'by September you will have a brand new sofa and a newly fitted kitchen'. Verbal agreements are not enough!
- You have a total figure of what it will cost you to live there, including your deposit. Also be aware of any hidden charges, such as 'signing fees' and charges for damages. You can avoid being caught out by getting your contract checked;
- You have seen the original copy of the Gas Safety Certificate and Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) relating to the property;
- The landlord/letting agent's contact details are written into the contract. It is important you know whose house you are living in and you never know when you may need to contact them.



## STEP 8:

# ASK QUESTIONS & GET ADVICE!

**Remember:** attend the events, get the knowledge and don't rush! Here you will find a useful list of contacts to give you a helping hand along the way.

### USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

#### Guild Advice

Guild Advice is an independent, free, and confidential service for all students of the University of Birmingham. They specialise in five main areas: academic, employment, finance, housing, and immigration. You can access support via Guild Advice's weekday drop-in service, an online enquiry service, or from the website resources.

Visit: **Ground Floor, Guild of Students**

Call: **0121 251 2400**

Email: [guildadvice@guild.bham.ac.uk](mailto:guildadvice@guild.bham.ac.uk)

Online: [guildofstudents.com/support/guildadvice](http://guildofstudents.com/support/guildadvice)

#### Living

Visit: **University Centre (ground floor)**

Call: **0121 414 8000**

Email: [living@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:living@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

Online: [www.birminghamstudentpad.co.uk](http://www.birminghamstudentpad.co.uk)

University accommodation applications: [www.birmingham.ac.uk/accommodation/apply](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/accommodation/apply)

'Follow' us on Twitter: [@livingatbham](https://twitter.com/livingatbham)

'Like' us on: [www.facebook.com/birminghamaccommodation](https://www.facebook.com/birminghamaccommodation)

#### Midlands Landlord Accreditation Scheme (MLAS)

Call: **0121 288 2008**

Email: [talk@mlas.org.uk](mailto:talk@mlas.org.uk)

Online: [www.mlas.org.uk](http://www.mlas.org.uk)

#### Guild Lettings

Visit: **University Centre (ground floor)**

Call: **0121 415 8374**

Email: [guildlettings@guild.bham.ac.uk](mailto:guildlettings@guild.bham.ac.uk)

Online: [www.guildlettingsbirmingham.co.uk](http://www.guildlettingsbirmingham.co.uk)

# Events taking place throughout housing season 2016/17!

EVENT	DAY & DATE	TIME	LOCATION
House Hunting Information Day	Wednesday 2nd November	10am-3pm	The Underground, Guild of Students
Housing Information Talk	Wednesday 2nd November	6-7pm	Leo's Bar, Pritchatts Park
Housing Information Talk	Wednesday 2nd November	7:30-8:30pm	The Vale (JCs Social Room)
Online Virtual Q&A Session	Monday 7th November	4-7pm	<a href="http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/HouseHuntingVirtualQ&amp;A">www.birmingham.ac.uk/ HouseHunting VirtualQ&amp;A</a>
Housemate Finder event	Monday 14th November	6-8pm	The Underground, Guild of Students
Guild Lettings Housing Fair	Wednesday 16th November	11am-4pm	Amos Room, Guild of Students
Living Housing Fair	Friday 18th November	11am-3pm	Great Hall, Aston Webb building
Housemate Finder event	Tuesday 29th November	6-8pm	The Underground, Guild of Students
Housemate Finder event	Thursday 19th January	6-8pm	The Underground, Guild of Students
Housemate Finder event	Tuesday 28th February	6-8pm	Rosa Parks, Guild of Students

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