

So you're moving out: Advice on Finding a Student House

This is a short guide designed by the Students' Union Advice Centre on avoiding the possible pitfalls of living in the private sector. This can be an exciting time and if you follow these general rules, you and your housemates can enjoy your new accommodation.

Basic house hunting rules

- Don't panic, there are plenty of houses out there; you will find the right one.
- Look around and compare a few houses before you choose, don't choose a house purely on its location to pub/off license
- Check out the local area to see who your neighbours are (students, long term residents?)
- Seek agreement from your housemates on location & room choice/size
- If possible ask the current tenants what the house is like and any possible problems
- Do make sure the house is secure and the heating, water and electrics are in working order
- Don't be pressurised into signing before you understand the terms of the lease

Things to remember...

- The vast majority of contracts are 12 months so you will be paying rent over the following summer.
- A lease is a legally binding document, once signed you are committed to paying rent for 12 months
- Someone will need to pay for the electricity, heating, TV channels. Work out who will and when
- You are legally entitled to a copy of the lease, the agents contact details and the landlords contact details. This is the law, if the agent will not give you the landlord's details, find somewhere else.

Looking to rent or advertise a room online? Here are some useful websites.

www.nistudentpad.com www.belfast.gumtree.com www.rentinbelfast.com www.spareroom.com www.daft.ie www.flatshare.com

There is also a notice board on the second floor of the Students' Union to advertise your spare room.

Looking for a house or apartment?

www.nistudentpad.co.uk www.propertynews.com <http://www.property.ie/property-to-let/antrim/>

The Students' Union DOES NOT RECOMMEND any Estate agents or websites, we merely present the options.



Before signing the lease

The Advice Centre deals with many students who were expecting the landlord to do something that doesn't happen. If the landlord says that something will be fixed, cleaned, replaced, painted then get him/her to write this down and sign it. Keep a copy in case it's not done.

Read through the lease and look for any hidden charges, some landlords charge up to £200 for a replacement key and £100 for a replacement bin. Once signed, you are agreeing to pay these charges.

Things to remember...

Dealing with accommodation problems:

- Keep a copy of your lease or tenancy agreement in a safe place
- Agree who will pay the utility bills and when
- Take all reasonable steps to ensure that you and your guests do not damage the property.
- Undertake minor day to day maintenance, for example unblocking sinks and replacing light bulbs. Keep the front garden clean and recycle all bottles and cans
- Keep the property clean, including the cooker, fridge and freezer, toilet, and bath/shower.
- It is your responsibility to take reasonable steps to prevent condensation. Close the kitchen door when cooking and if possible keep a window open. Use extractor fans where provided.
- If at any stage repairs need to be carried out in your house contact the landlord/ agent in writing as soon as possible. A simple note stating what has happened and what needs repair. Allow a reasonable amount of time for repairs to be carried out.
- Protect the property during periods of absence i.e. if you have a burglar alarm make sure you use it and that all doors/windows are secure when you leave the property.
- You can enjoy yourself but must consider your neighbours and other residents. Queen's takes antisocial behaviour very seriously so if you make too much noise you can expect a visit from the Wardens, PSNI, Noise pollution Unit and/or a representative of the University.
- Pay your rent on time. If you are having financial difficulties, firstly let you landlord know then contact the Student Advice Centre
- Find out when bin day is. Make sure you put out all your refuse in time to avoid attracting vermin.
- Your deposit is to cover any repairs or cleaning the property will require at the end of the tenancy. It is not your last month's rent unless agreed with the landlord in advance.
- Your landlord cannot enter the premises without permission unless in case of emergency. You cannot be forcibly removed as asked to move out without 28 days notice in writing.
- If you have any questions contact the Student Advice Centre.