

YORK ST JOHN
STUDENTS' UNION



YSJSU

**Housing
Guide**



SECTION 1: BEFORE YOU MOVE!

How To Find The Best Place To Live

When should I start looking?

York's student rental properties generally start being advertised in December. However, we encourage students not to rush into renting a house - houses are still available come February! Our November Housing Fair marks the beginning of the student house-hunting season for the next academic year.

Where can I find Student Housing Agencies?

Most of the student agencies in York will be at the Housing Fair in November. You will be able to ask questions to landlords on subjects such as arranging a house viewing and more. You will also be able to find all the student housing agencies online. They will have an online catalogue for all of their houses for you to have a look at and arrange a viewing.

Where do students live in York?

There is no 'designated' student area in York, student houses are scattered all throughout the city. When considering a place to live, it is worth taking into account the distance to campus, the rent, and also the transport links.

Find the Right Housmates!

You can sometimes forget how important it is to spend time and think about the people you are looking for a house with. You may find that a really good friend still doesn't make the best housemate. It's important to ask 'can I really live with this person?'. It is better to make tough decisions before you sign a tenancy agreement with someone!

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Viewing a House

When you view a house, it is important to pay close attention to the facilities and structure. Keep an eye out for signs of damp, mould, electrical faults, and any signs of infestation. It is also a good idea to write everything that you are promised by the agency and/or landlord on paper. By keeping a record of what has been said will better support you in getting things replaced or repaired. It is also good to take photos of any defects you find upon moving in as evidence.

Questions to ask when viewing a property:

- Who is the main manager of the property?
- Who do I report repairs or faults to?
- Is there an out of hours contact number?
- Are bills included?
- Are there any agency fees?
- What is the contract length?
- Is outdoor maintenance included?
- Can I park my car at the property?
- Are pets allowed?
- Where is the electric and water meter? (Upon moving in, always take a picture of the readings!)

Top Tip:

Speaking to previous or current tenants is also a good idea, it is very useful to hear about their experiences of living in a particular house.



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Remaining in University Accommodation

If you are wanting a room in university accommodation you will need to re-apply. The number of rooms in halls are limited as priority is given to first year students. Speak to the accommodation team (accommodation@yorks.ac.uk) to find out more information.

Letting Agencies

Going to a letting agency is a great way to find out about the student houses they offer, most letting agencies have a website where you can book a viewing for a property.

When signing a tenancy agreement, the agency will ask for a deposit. This is taken by the agency as a precaution for the landlord in the case of any damage or loss incurred during your stay.

Deductions can also be taken from the deposit if the landlord deems there to be issues with the cleanliness or overall condition of the property. Deposits are safeguarded by one of the government approved protection schemes (DPS). It is important that you check with the agency that your deposit is protected.



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Bills and Budgeting Tips

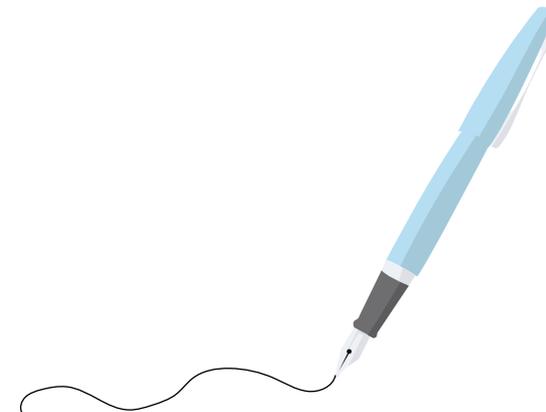
It is important that when you are budgeting for a house that you take into account all your expenditures such as:

- Housing costs
- Books and study costs
- Travel
- Bills
- Socialising
- Extra-Curricular Activities

Private Rented Accommodation Costs

Item	Weekly	Yearly
Estimated rent in a shared house (52 weeks)	£100-£130	£5,200-£6,760
Household Bills (52 weeks)	£14.50	£754
Food (40 weeks)	£33.50	£1,340
Toiletries, household items and laundry (40 weeks)	£13.50	£540
Internet	£5	£260
Contents insurance		From £29
Sports and social costs (not including travel)	£26	£1,040

Reference: <https://www.york.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/fees-funding/living-costs/>



SECTION 2: ONCE YOU'RE IN!

Council Tax

What is council tax?

Council Tax is a tax on residential properties by local authorities.

Do students need to pay it?

If you live in a property occupied only by full-time students, the property is exempt from council tax.

You and your housemates will need to apply for a 'Council Tax Exemption'. You can do this online at <https://www.york.gov.uk/student-council-tax/student-council-tax-discounts-exemptions/1>

If not everyone in your house is a full-time student, then they will have to pay council tax. If they are the only person living in the house who is not a student in full-time education, then they will be entitled to a discount on council tax. More information can be found at <https://www.york.gov.uk/student-council-tax>



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Safety

Like all cities there are unsafe areas, however York is, according to official crime figures from 2020, the safest city in England and Wales. (<https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/local-news/yorkshires-most-dangerous-cities-ranked-20769911>)

Here are some simple tips that will help you keep safe during your time in York:

- Stay alert. It is nice to listen to music whilst walking but this can make you less alert to things happening around you and hard for you to spot trouble.
- Acquire a personal alarm from the SU.
- Walk in well-lit areas. When it gets dark and you are walking alone, try to stick to main roads and those which are well lit – even if it takes you on a longer route.
- Plan. Take time to think about how you will get to wherever you are going to but also how you will get back home.

What safety elements should I consider when inspecting a house?

- The route. How far away is the property to campus or the nearest bus stop? Is the street well-lit or is it dark and isolated?
- Doors and windows. Are the doors and windows secure and lockable?
- The neighbourhood. What is the area like? Does the location make you feel uncomfortable about the prospect of living in the area?

Emergency Contacts:

- Police, Fire, Ambulance (Emergency) – 999
- Police (Non-Emergency) – 101
- Medical (Non-Emergency) – 111
- Rape Crisis - <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/want-to-talk/>
- Drug Advice – 0300 123 6600
- York Nightline – 01904 323735
- York Street Angels - 07533 933 063 (Office hours Mon-Fri/Fri day and Saturday nights 10pm-2:30am)

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Different Types of Accommodation

Flats vs. Houses

Not all students want to live in a student house, some prefer to live in purpose-built student accommodation. This type of accommodation is normally a block of flats with en-suite rooms and access to self-contained cooking facilities. The rent of purpose-built student accommodation is usually higher than rented student houses, but it does usually include council tax and bills.

Guarantors

What is a guarantor?

A guarantor is a person who signs an agreement to pay the rent owed to the landlord or agent in the case of the tenant not paying it themselves. For most students their guarantor is a parent or guardian.

A guarantor is required to:

- Be a resident in the UK
- Complete a reference check



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Deposits

Found a house?

When you have found a house that you like and would like to sign for, the landlord or letting agency will ask you to pay a holding deposit. This is normally equivalent to one or two weeks rent.

What happens to this deposit?

Once the deposit is paid the landlord or letting agency will stop advertising the property. If your landlord no longer wants to rent the house anymore, then your deposit should be returned to you in full.

What if I change my mind?

It is important that you only pay a deposit if you are 100% sure about the house. If you pay the deposit and then back out of the house you may lose some or all of the deposit. There are two types of deposit, a **housing deposit** and a **holding deposit**, and it is important to distinguish between the two.

You should check the terms and conditions, given to you by the letting agency before you pay your deposit; this will also allow you to see how your deposit will be treated. If you think your deposit is being withheld unfairly or used in the wrong way, you can seek advice from the three schemes available: Deposit Protection Service (<https://www.deposit-protection.com/>), Tenancy Deposit Scheme (<https://www.tenancydepositscheme.com>), and My Deposits (<https://www.mydeposits.co.uk>).

At the end of your tenancy the landlord or agency will return your deposit, they can take deductions if they feel there is any repairs or cleaning that needs to be done to the property.

Our Tips:

- Get full information about the deposit scheme that the deposit is entered into.
- Ask for a draft copy of the tenancy agreement
- Read over everything thoroughly before you sign
- If you have any concerns, speak to your Deposit Protection Scheme.

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Contracts

Contracts are given to you once you have decided the house you would like to live in for the next academic year. Before you sign anything, it is vital that you thoroughly read through all the small print. It is also a good idea to ask a parent or guardian to read through it as well.

The most important things to look out for in a contract:

- Does the landlord own the property?
- Are there any unfair aspects of the contract?
- Does the contract reflect what you verbally agreed with the landlord?
- Do you understand all aspects of the contract?

What should the contract include?

- Your name, your landlords name and their address
- The address of the property you are renting
- Start date of the contract
- Length of the contract
- How much you pay for rent, including the monthly rate
- When your rent is due
- If bills are included
- What type of contract it is? (i.e. Joint Tenancy, Single Occupancy)

Do you have any rights?

Most students will sign a Joint Tenancy Agreement. Under the Joint Tenancy Agreement, you will have things that you are and are not entitled to. These include:

- Exclusive Possession – Your landlord cannot come into your home without 24 hours' notice.
- Tenancy Deposit Protection – your deposit needs to be protected
- Protection from eviction – your landlord will need a court order before you can be evicted from your home
- Notice period – your landlord usually needs to give at least two months written notice on a standard form to end

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What are my obligations?

These obligations should be set out in your contract, if they are not then you must bring this up with your landlord before signing the contract:

- Paying rent
- Keeping the property clean and tidy
- Reporting repairs to the agency or landlord
- Replacing light bulbs and smoke alarm batteries
- Preventing the property from sustaining damage

Break Clause

Most student contracts are a fixed 12-month contract, if you are wanting a shorter contract then you will need to negotiate this with the landlord and/or agency.

What is a break clause?

A break clause allows either the tenants or the landlord to end the tenancy by giving an early notice. If this happens then we would advise you to seek advice on the wording of this, a break clause may be used unfairly and give the landlord greater flexibility and rights.



SECTION 2: ONCE YOU'RE IN!

Moving into Your House

After all the paperwork has been completed and you've been handed the keys to your new home, there are still some things to bear in mind and make sure you have:

- Copy of the tenancy agreement
- Check-in inventory and schedule of condition
- Take photographs of the conditions of the rooms in the property as evidence of the state of the property when moving in.
- Gas safety certificate
- Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)
- How to Rent booklet <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-rent>
- Deposit Protection Certificate and prescribed information

Make sure to keep copies of all paperwork that is given to you by the landlord or letting agency.

After you have checked you have been given all the important information by the letting agency or landlord, you now need to sort out the following:

- Bills
- Council Tax (Full-time students are exempt from council tax but part-time students are not. If a part-time student or non-student lives with students, they are liable for council tax payments.)
- Internet
- Insurance
- Inventory (written record of what is there at the property and the condition it is in when you moved in)

SECTION 2: ONCE YOU'RE IN!

Advice (Repairs):

Your contract should outline whose responsibility it is for the different repairs you may have at your rented property. The law also implies that it is the landlord's responsibility to keep the property safe and in good condition. If you are unsure about who is responsible for certain repairs, then it is best to seek advice from the letting agency.

Landlord's Responsibilities:

- Heating, hot water and other water supply
- Basins, sinks, baths, and toilets
- External structure of the property
- Gas appliances
- Fixed electrical installations

Tenant's Responsibilities

- To report any repair issues to the landlord or letting agent
- Change lightbulbs
- Test smoke alarms
- Keep the inside and outside of the property clean



SECTION 2: ONCE YOU'RE IN!

Advice (Reporting):

If you have an issue, then you must report it! You can do this over the phone, in-person or via email. It is important to keep a record of what was discussed and the date and time. It is also useful to send a follow up email to check on progress and put everything on the record.

What details should I include in the report?

- What is broken/faulty or not working?
- When did the incident occur?
- Is it affecting anything else in the property?
- Provide evidence, photograph everything!

How long should it take for a problem to be fixed?

A landlord should fix any problems as soon as possible. If you feel things are taking too long, then you should seek advice from your letting agency.



SECTION 2: ONCE YOU'RE IN!

Advice (Following Up):

What can I do if the problem does not get fixed?

If your landlord or letting agency is not seeing to any repairs or maintenance within a reasonable time frame, they may be in breach of the tenancy agreement. It would be worth writing a follow-up letter/email to the landlord/letting agency. You can also reach out to the City of York Council for their advice on such matters.

Am I allowed to stop paying my rent if this happens?

We would not advise you to stop paying rent if you are having maintenance problems, your obligation to pay rent is separate from the landlord's obligation to carry out repairs. If you decide to stop paying your rent, your landlord is entitled to evict you. They can also take you to court for rent arrears. This is the most likely scenario as most tenancies are only one year long, and the eviction process could take a long period of time.

Am I allowed to carry out repairs myself?

It is extremely risky for you to carry out any repairs yourself. You would be responsible for any defects or further damage caused to the property; the landlord could also refuse to reimburse you for the money you have spent.



SECTION 2: ONCE YOU'RE IN!

Mould and Damp

Unfortunately, many student houses suffer from problems with mould or damp. If you have stale smells, discoloured walls or ceilings then these are signs that you could have mould in your house. If you experience any problems with damp or mould you should report it to your landlord or letting agency. Letting agencies and landlords are very quick to blame the growth of damp and mould on students.

What causes damp or mould?

- Condensation
- Lack of insulation
- Leaking pipes
- Rainwater coming through external walls
- Blocked guttering or overflowing drains

Things you can do to prevent the growth of mould:

- Wipe down any condensation that is on walls or windows
- Check extractor fans are in working order
- Keep the property adequately heated and ventilated
- Don't dry clothes on radiators and ventilate (open windows). Most damp is caused by condensation and is not structural.

Handy Tips:

- Try and tackle the mould
- Try and show that the size of the mould has grown and its location
- Inform them about any changes or updates to the situation
- Keep taking photos to provide evidence

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Intrusive Landlords

If your landlord does not live at the property, then they have no right to enter the property without your permission. (This can vary if single occupancy contracts are issued). Check your tenancy agreement on what your landlord or letting agent can do, most often they can inspect the property to:

- Inspect the property
- Carry out repairs
- Show new tenants around

All of the above are allowed if the landlord or letting agent have given 24 hours' notice. If the landlord or letting agent is not following these rules, then it is important that you write a complaint and seek advice from City of York Council.

Where can you get advice?

Shelter

Shelter is a housing and homeless charity. Their website is full of useful information and advice, including an online deposit checker to make sure your deposit is protected. They also provide template letters around deposit and repair issues. For more information: <https://england.shelter.org.uk/>

Citizens Advice

Citizens advice provide excellent resources over on their website. For more information visit <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>.

City of York Council

The council are able to point you in the right direction. If you cannot get through to their phone line, you can also start a web chat on their website. <https://www.york.gov.uk/>.

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Key Contacts:

York St John Students' Union – 01904 629816 / su@yorks.ac.uk

York St John Accommodation Team (University Accommodation only) – 01904 876 660 / accommodation@yorks.ac.uk

City of York Council – 01904 551550 / york.gov.uk

Citizens Advice – 0808 2787895 / www.citizensadviceyork.org.uk

Deposit Protection Service – 0330 303 0030 / contactus@depositprotection.com

Tenancy Deposit Scheme - (<https://www.tenancydeposit.com>)

My Deposits - (<https://www.mydeposits.co.uk>)



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