



**KEEP
CALM
AND
THINK
OFF-CAMPUS**

Independent Advice Unit



KUSU
KEELE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION
KUSU is a Registered Charity No. 1137380



A place to call home...



Started thinking about living off-campus? Where you'll call home next year? Remember keep calm and relax and take it step by step so that you can find the best place for you.

Finding a house is a huge task but with this booklet it doesn't have to be a stressfull one. This booklet will give you all the essential information on house hunting from what to look for to who you can ask for help. This is a fantastic oppurtunity to get clued up and ready for the new and exciting off-campus experience that awaits you.

My most important word of advice: if you've got a question, ask! The Independent Advice Unit offers a range of housing advice that is specifically tailored to you. Remember if you don't ask then they can't help!

Matt Bedding
Vice President (Welfare)

01782733702

vp.welfare@kusu.keele.ac.uk



Love or hate your flat mate...

Decision number one and a pretty important decision; who to live with? Choose carefully!

Unless you choose to live on your own you will spend around 70% of your time with your housemates, so it's a good idea to make sure you all get on...

Think about the following:

- Are you more interested in partying than working or vice versa?
- Are you messy? Are your housemates messy?
- Do you need privacy or are you comfortable to leave your door open?

Be honest about your interests and what you want out of a housemate. If there are too many differences, you may need to think again.

Arguments often are about; Bills, food, cleaning, personality clashes, whose turn it is to put the bin out and noise.

What to look for in a property...

Think about what you **need** as opposed to what you **want** e.g. enough study space or wooden flooring? We have produced a 'House Hunting Checklist' which gives you all the questions you need to think about, with a tick list so that you can compare properties and decide which property is for you!

For a complete list of questions you should ask from initially viewing a property to signing a tenancy agreement see the 'House Hunting Checklist'



Local Area Information

If you are new to the area it is hard to know where to look for accommodation, how / where to travel, what the local amenities are etc. etc. etc.! We aim to help:

Public transport info and local area maps: Go to this leaflet online to see the link, or google the key works in brackets)

[Bus timetables](#) (Staffordshire county council public transport)

[Journey planner](#) (Firstgroup)

For information such as your local supermarkets, shops, chemists etc go to [Local Information](#) (upmystreet) if you know a property postcode pop this in the search engine and pick what you would like to find out about the area. If you don't know the postcode you can use the Students' Union's postcode to see what's available in the nearby area – search with ST5 5BJ.

The majority of students living off campus aim to be able to get to a bus stop on the number 25 bus route as this is the bus that comes onto Keele campus (see the journey planning map above) the main areas of living are; Newcastle, Silverdale, Hartshill, Stoke, Shelton & Hanley. However there are other locations such as, Maybank, Wolstanton, Chesterton, Madeley that are within the area but you would have to get a bus to Newcastle bus station to change and get the 25 bus to Keele.

Not much fun but good to know; If you would like to check out the crime rates in the area, your local police officers names and contact details go to [Police](#) to compare crime rates with your home area, if you would like to speak to someone about safety and crime in the area contact the Advice Unit or the local police.

Rental Prices

Rent prices vary in the area but they are typically between £40 - £85 per week per person, this may vary due to quality and location. Rent will be stated in your contract. Bills may be included in some rent prices. The Student Pad website updates rent, areas statistics on a daily basis, check this out to see likely rent prices and areas available at [Studentpad](#) (studentpad)

Make sure you can afford the rent!



Where and how do I find properties in the area?

Houses are advertised on Studentpad www.studentpad.co.uk



Please note: The only checks which are done by the University are: Whether the landlord has supplied a valid Gas Safety and Electrical Safety Certificate and Energy Performance Certificate, the houses are not inspected. Landlords on Student Pad are not recommended by the Advice Unit or local council unless they are accredited by the local Council. Check with the Advice Unit to see if a landlord is a member of an accredited landlord scheme.

There is a message board on student pad, for 'accommodation available', 'accommodation wanted' and 'Find a Flat Mate'. You can post messages on here and read other peoples messages regarding accommodation.

Student Pad Top Tip: Check Staffordshire University's link on Student Pad as they have a list of landlords with properties in Hartshill and Stoke that may still be on the No.25 Bus route to Keele campus.

Facebook – Keele Accommodation

If you search Facebook for 'Keele Accommodation' you will find the 'Keele Accommodation Group' Keele students can discuss and post messages regarding accommodation both on and off campus, you can post messages on here if you require accommodation or are advertising accommodation.



www.spareroom.co.uk Rooms available to rent in people's homes and independently in the local area, you can also sign up for email alerts. You can also sign up to www.student.spareroom.co.uk/



Local houses to rent and buy as well as lots of local information about the area

<http://www.upmystreet.com/properties/to-rent/st5-5bj.html>



**Keele
University**

Check out the university campus discussion boards on the website, there is a board for accommodation, log in to read and post messages [www.https://forums.keele.ac.uk/](http://forums.keele.ac.uk/)

Find a Property

You can search the area by postcode and check out properties to rent on this website, the properties are managed by letting and estate agents.



Please note: Estate and letting agents may request references, may need you to provide a 'Guarantor' and may also refuse to take students as tenants. They may also charge additional fees, check in the Unit as some fees are illegal.



The local newspaper '**The Sentinel**' advertises properties to rent and to buy, there are lists in every day and Thursday's edition has extended property pages. You can buy 'The Sentinel' from 'Martin's' newsagents on campus or any local newsagents for 33p!

We also ask that when you do get your house, that you feedback your experiences either to us directly, or through <http://www.studentsay.co.uk/>.





Contracts

It's really boring and not a fun thing to do, but you need to spend time finding out what you are signing up to. We have put information in this booklet as a guide, but it is not a full account of the law, so we recommend you read the booklet 'Assured and Assured Shorthold Tenancies: A guide for tenants' from the Communities and Local Government website, or 'Private Tenancies' from the Shelter website.

The contract sets out your rights and those of the landlord, for example your right to live in the house and the landlord's right to be paid the rent. Once you sign a contract you are usually legally bound by its terms. The contract cannot take any of your statutory rights away, so you may have more rights than are written in the contract, e.g. If your landlord wants to evict you because you haven't paid your rent there are certain procedures they have to go through. If a contract is a 'joint' contract and someone drops out, those left may have to pay the missing person's rent if they cannot find a replacement. Too many people don't read the contract and end up signing for things they don't agree with or understand, don't be one of them, read the contract carefully and **GET THE CONTRACT CHECKED BY THE INDEPENDENT ADVICE UNIT BEFORE YOU SIGN IT!**

Top Tips

- Always look at more than one property
- Don't let the landlord panic you into signing a contract immediately.
- Have you seen the **exact property** you will be renting? If you see a property and are told the one you will be renting and living in is 'the same as this one' Do Not sign a contract!
- If you and the landlord/letting agent make a verbal agreement e.g. the property will get a new carpet, sofa etc by September, do not sign the contract until this is written in it, verbal agreements like this are not good enough, as they are very difficult to enforce.
- Make sure you can afford the rent before you sign, get a total figure of the cost to live there; deposit, monthly rent, make sure there are **no hidden charges** such as an admin fee, fees for a cleaner etc.
- Do you have to pay to have the house professionally cleaned at the end of the tenancy?



- Make sure you have the landlord / letting agents **contact details** on the contract, you need to be able to contact them should you need to.
- **You can check if a landlord is 'Accredited' by the local Council by contacting the Advice Unit, check this out before you sign!**
- Has the landlord shown you an 'Energy Performance Certificate'? You should see this before you move in. With all properties now rated from A to G, finding a more energy efficient property could help you save money on fuel bills.
- Your landlord / agent must show you a valid Gas Safety Certificate before you move in, if they do not do this, contact the Advice Unit and do not sign the contract.

Holding Deposits

You may be asked to pay this for a house you want, but you haven't signed a contract yet. When you pay it you are agreeing to rent the property, so don't pay it if you still have houses to look at. Get info about any holding deposit you have to pay in writing with details of what will happen to the money, e.g. if you get it back when you move in, or if it can be part of the deposit once the contract is signed. If you don't end up moving into the property, and it is the landlord's fault or problem, you should be able to get the money back, though this can involve court action, so get everything in writing and get advice. If you pay the holding deposit and change your mind, you wouldn't normally be entitled to get the money back.

Deposits

When you are signing a new tenancy agreement with your landlord, ask how your deposit will be protected. Since April 2007, whenever you pay a deposit for an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (the most common student tenancy) the landlord / agent must protect your deposit by paying it into an independent deposit protection scheme. For a detailed guide to deposits see Shelter's guide, private tenancies: paying a deposit. Below is a guide, not a complete explanation of the law.



When you pay your deposit make sure you get a receipt. After 14 days of paying your deposit your landlord/ agent should be able to provide with the details of the holding scheme, including:

- The amount of deposit paid
- Property address the deposit has been paid for
- Landlord and tenants contact details
- Which scheme the deposit has been paid into and their contact details
- A certificate, with contact details of the scheme used and proof of payment into the scheme
- Any leaflet they have about the scheme
- What happens if the landlord or tenant cannot be contacted at the end of the tenancy
- Information on how to apply for the deposit back at the end of the tenancy
- How part or all of the deposit can be retained by the landlord
- The purpose of the deposit and what to do in the event of a dispute

If you landlord / agent cannot provide these details, contact the Advice Unit.

FAQ's

- **I have been asked for a reference, what do I do?** – Some agents will ask for a reference, have a think about who you can ask; they tend not to accept family members, maybe a personal tutor, doctor, family friend may do a reference for you.
- **The agent wants a Guarantor, what is this?** – As a student you may be asked for a 'Guarantor' this may be your parents. When a guarantor enters into an agreement, it means that in the event of a tenant being unable to meet their obligations under the tenancy agreement, whether it is for overdue rent, damage to the property or whatever, the Guarantor is legally bound to accept the liabilities on behalf of the tenant/s – guarantors are advised to get independent advice.
- **Will my belongings be covered by the landlords insurance?** – Landlords are not obliged to provide insurance to cover your possessions against damage or theft, they may have insurance to



protect their property against damage but this will not cover your belongings. Please make sure you are insured from the moment your move in, and if you are moving from one rented house to another, that you tell your insurance company that you are moving (the price may be different). **I am having difficulty paying my rent, what should I do?** – If you are struggling to pay your rent talk to your landlord and ask them if you can pay a smaller amount until you can pay everything you owe or for instance, if your student loan has been delayed explain this to the landlord and ask if you can have a period of non-payment of rent until the loan comes through and then pay the lump sum owed. If your landlord is not happy to accept this come and speak to the Advice Unit ASAP.

- **When can my landlord come into my home?** - Your Landlord should let you know they want to visit, and arrange a time that suits you. Your tenancy agreement may say how much notice they should give you (check with the Advice Unit if your agreement states they can enter the property at any time without notice!) if your landlord does come into your home without your permission, tell them to stop. If they do not stop it may be considered as harassment, which is against the law. If your landlord is coming into your property without your permission contact the Advice Unit.
- **There is damp in my property, what can I do? - There are things that you can do to prevent damp, don't dry clothes on radiator, use an ailer instead, so they dry more slowly, open the window after having a shower. However, there may be a bigger problem.** Your landlord is responsible for repairing problems with the property (unless you have caused them), tell your landlord about this things that need fixing as soon as possible –it might be a good idea to write or email them and keep a copy of the letter / email as proof that you have asked them. Damp and mould can be difficult as it may be due to a problem with the building that cannot be easily fixed. If you have any belongings that have been damaged you may be able to get the landlord to pay to replace or repair the belongings but this will depend on the circumstances. If your landlord won't fix the problem come and speak to the Advice Unit and we will see what we can do to help.
- **Can my landlord throw me out?** - Your landlord can very rarely evict you without warning. If they want you to leave, they must follow a set procedure, which includes giving you written notice that tells you when you must leave (the notice period). Even if you do



not leave by the given time, the landlord must normally go through 'possession proceedings' before they can evict you. The exact procedure your landlord will have to take will depend on the type of tenancy you have. The procedures taken will also be different if they want you to leave for example because you haven't paid your rent to if they need you to leave as they need to move back into the property themselves. In most cases your landlord will need an order from the court before they can evict you. If you receive notice to leave, or your landlord threatens eviction, contact the Advice Unit as soon as possible

- **I have a question which isn't here?**- Contact the Independent Advice Unit if you have any further questions. If they can't help they'll be able to point you in the right direction so that you aren't left wondering.

Accommodation Jargon

Not sure what some of the words and terms in your contract or your landlord / agent is using mean? This should help!

Word / Term	Meaning
Assured Shorthold Tenancy	You have the right to remain in the property unless that landlord can prove to a court that he she has grounds for possession.
Administration fee	Money paid normally to letting or estate agents before the tenancy starts for things like credit checks. <i>(If you are asked to pay a fee and you are not sure what it is for or its sound unreasonable speak to the Advice Unit)</i>
Agreement	Same as contract (see below)
Behaving in a tenant like manner	Look after the property, do not damage the property or its contents deliberately, keep it clean to a reasonable standard.



Contract	The legally binding agreement between tenant and landlord, the right to occupy the property, landlord's right to receive rent. Both landlords and tenants rights and obligations are set out in this.
Deposit	Money given to the landlord at the beginning of the tenancy for damages to the property, cleaning or outstanding rent or bill- See Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme
Deduction from Deposit	Money taken at the end of a tenancy for damages to the property, cleaning or outstanding rent or bills (should not include reasonable wear and tear, see below)
Disrepair	A fault or problem that falls under the landlord's duty to repair.
Dispute	Normally when the tenant and landlord don't agree on the amount deducted from deposit.
Eviction	When the landlord obtains a court order ordering you to leave the property. You cannot normally be evicted without a court order.
Fixtures & Fittings	Fixtures are items that cannot be removed without causing damage to the property e.g. fireplace or fitted wardrobes. Fittings are items that could be removed e.g. rugs, mirrors etc.
Gas Safety Certificate	Required by law to certify that the gas appliances and any gas in the property adhere to health and safety standards.
Guarantor	Another person who agrees to pay the tenants rent if the tenant does not do so.
House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO)	Property where a single room is rented & 'common areas' exist & are shared by more than one household. If the property is made up of 3 floors and 5 or more households the landlord will be required to obtain a HMO licence.



Inventory	A record of the contents & condition of the property. If your landlord does not provide you with one, write your own, and send a copy as soon after you move in as possible. You can also take pictures if you wish.
Joint Tenancy	A contract for a group of people to rent the whole property. Each person is jointly responsible for the others actions e.g. damage caused, rent.
Landlord	The owner of the property being rented
Lodger	Someone who pays rent to live in a room in the same house as the landlord.
Notice	Notification given by one party of the contract to the other that they intend to end the contract. <i>(Give notice in writing by letter or email and keep a copy for your records)</i>
Rent	Money paid by the tenant to the landlord for exclusive use of the property or room.
Rent Arrears	Rent due has not been paid
Replacement Tenant	The original tenant transfers the contract into another person's name so they can take over the tenancy. The original tenant loses all rights to the property & is no longer party to the contract.
Tenancy Agreement	See 'Contract'
Tenancy Deposit Scheme	Protection scheme that landlords must legally use to protect your deposit.
Tenant (s)	A person or group of people who rent & occupy the property belonging to another person.
TV Licence	A licence required by law allowing you to watch television programmes whether by using a TV, laptop, PC or other electrical device.



Where to get help

Independent Advice Unit

01782 734800

iau@kusu.keele.ac.uk

www.kusu.net/iau

Newcastle Borough Council Housing Standards

01782 742527

www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk and www.landlordaccreditation.co.uk

National Grid's Gas Emergency

Freephone number: 0800 111 999

Shelter

www.shelter.org.uk

Health & Safety Executive

<http://www.hse.gov.uk>