



Private sector housing



An illustration of a woman with dark skin and a large afro hairstyle, wearing a purple dress, standing and pointing with a white marker at a chalkboard. Three people are seated in the foreground, seen from behind: a man with a white head, a woman with long dark hair, and a man with a beard. They are sitting on a dark blue bench. The chalkboard is dark grey and contains text.

This guide is intended to help you:

- Find somewhere safe and comfortable to live.
- Understand your rights.
- Know what to do if you need help or advice.

When and where to start

Don't feel pressured into signing a housing contract – take the time to really look at the contract, and to think about whether it's right for you.

Students sometimes feel under pressure to sign contracts early on, but remember: housing contracts are legally binding documents. Once you have signed a contract you are bound by the terms until it ends on the specified date.

Southampton has a competitive accommodation market so it's important to do your research before you are ready to rent.

The University private housing accreditation scheme usually advertises approved properties for next academic year around November or December.

Specific requirements

If you have specific requirements - for example a short-term contract, accessible accommodation, or somewhere which allows pets - it's advisable to start your research well in advance.

How to contact us

The university has a private housing advisor who is based within the accommodation team. The private housing advisor will advise on:

- General housing questions.
- Contract checking.
- SASSH, the universities private housing accreditation scheme.
- Current housing campaigns.

For general housing advice or to book an appointment to speak to the private housing advisor, email **private.housing@solent.ac.uk**

The University also owns and manages its own residences. You can find out more at **www.solent.ac.uk/accommodation**, or by contacting the accommodation office on **accommodaton@solent.ac.uk**



SASSH – Southampton Accreditation Scheme for Student Housing

The university has a housing accreditation scheme, SASSH, which is run in partnership with the University of Southampton and Southampton City Council. The website lists available accommodation such as rooms in shared houses, apartments and flats.

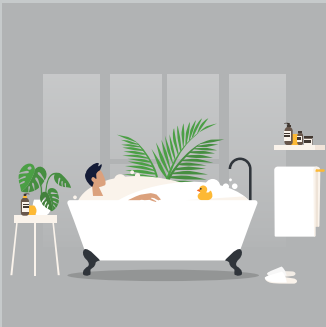
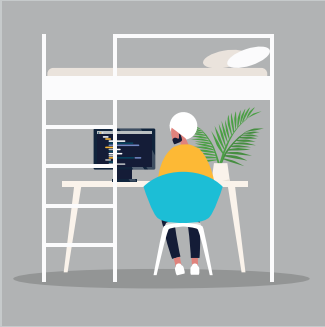
All landlords listed on the site have signed up to a voluntary code of conduct and agreed that their properties will meet certain standards that are above the legal minimum requirements for private housing. The scheme also has its own complaints procedure.

To read more about the housing standards or search for accredited properties, register at www.sassh.co.uk.

For automatic access to the scheme, you can sign up using your university email address. It is possible to register using an alternative address, however this will need to be verified by the University first and there may be a delay in approving your access.

SASSH message board

The SASSH website also has a message board function where students are able to advertise for housemates, or to fill spare rooms. This can be a useful function for finding short term accommodation. Please be aware that students are able to advertise a room in any property, therefore the properties may not have been advertised on the University's housing accreditation scheme and may not meet SASSH standards.



Shared houses

Shared houses are rented either directly through a private landlord or are managed through an agency.

If you live in a shared house, typically you would have your own bedroom but share communal facilities such as the kitchen, lounge, and bathroom with other tenants. This is often viewed as a more affordable option. In many cases bills are not included in the rent.

HMO licensing

In addition to the mandatory licencing scheme, Southampton operates an additional licensing scheme in some areas of the city. This means that to rent out a shared property the landlord must obtain a licence from the City Council.

Licensing rules mean that there are extra measures in place to promote fire safety and adequate facilities for the size of the property.

Important

Remember, if a property is not listed on SASSH, the university is limited in the assistance it is able to provide if things go wrong.



Purpose-built student accommodation

An increasing number of purpose-built student accommodation options are available for rent across Southampton. Often described as 'hotel style', each site is run by a different private operator and are completely independent of the University.

There are several private providers operating in Southampton, offering nationally accredited accommodation; the options range from single study rooms to studio apartments, and everything in-between. You can view a list of developments local to Southampton at www.sassh.co.uk/Pages/private%20halls. Importantly, all of the listed providers are signed up to the ANUK Code. Any provider that is signed up to the code has agreed to manage their accommodation to an approved national and government approved standard; you can find out more on the ANUK Code website.

For further information, contact each provider directly to find out what they offer.

Resident landlords

Some landlords let out spare rooms in their home; this is commonly referred to as lodgings. Arrangements may be for self-catering, or may include meals.

Please be aware that if you live with your landlord you will have less legal protection. However, this option may be appropriate for you if you require a flexible or short contract as you are able to move out at short notice. Some students also enjoy the homelike atmosphere of living with a family.

Guest houses, bed and breakfasts, Hotels

There are a number of guest houses, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) and hotels across Southampton. Although more expensive, this may be a useful option if you are looking for a short stay.

Please note that the Southampton Boat Show (a large, international event) takes place during the month of September, and many hotels and B&Bs are booked up in advance this can make it very difficult to find short-term accommodation during this time as. If you would like to arrange short term accommodation, early booking is strongly advised.

Letting and estate agents

If you choose to use an agency, ensure they are signed up to a professional body such as the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA). Visit www.nrla.org.uk for more information

Redress Schemes

By law, letting and estate agents must be signed up to a property redress scheme.

A Letting Agent redress scheme can resolve disputes between Letting Agents and their customers. Both Landlords and Tenants can complain to a scheme.

Viewing a property

It is always advisable to view a property in person. If it is a shared house each person should view the property before signing a contract.

Try and view the property during the daytime so that the condition of the property is clearer.

If you view a property during the daytime, bear in mind it could be noisier during the evening.

Safety

Safety is an important consideration when searching for accommodation. There are simple steps that you can take to improve your personal safety.

- When viewing a property it is always advisable to take someone with you.
- When looking at a property, think about the distance in relation to your place of study. Plan your route, consider how you will get there and how you will get home.
- Think about the local area, do you feel comfortable and would you feel the same after dark?
- Does the property seem safe, are the windows double glazed and lockable. Do the doors seem secure and in good working order?

Virtual viewings

It is always advisable to physically view a property where possible. However there are occasions where a virtual viewing could be useful, for example if you do not live locally, if you are self-isolating or if you want to take a look before arranging a physical viewing.

It is becoming more common for property adverts to include a filmed tour, however if possible it is best to request a live viewing. This is more likely to provide a realistic impression of what living in the property is like.

It is important to ask questions, so preparing a list of queries in advance of the viewing and writing down the answers would be useful.

You can also request additional information from the landlord/accommodation provider, such as additional photos of floor plans to assist in your decision making.

Tip

If you decide to ask the current tenants questions about living in the property, you may prefer to do this when the agent or landlord is not around. If you are viewing someone's home, always be polite and try to avoid being too invasive.



Property viewing checklist

Exterior

- ☐ Is the roof in good condition or are there tiles missing?
- ☐ Are the gutters overflowing?
- ☐ Is there a garden with the property?
- ☐ Will you be responsible for maintaining the garden?
- ☐ Are tools provided or will you be expected to provide them?
- ☐ Is there a secure shed?

Doors and windows

- ☐ Do you think that they look secure?
- ☐ Are the windows double glazed?
- ☐ Are the windows lockable, if so will you be provided with a key?

Flooring, walls and ceiling

- ☐ Are there any signs of pests?
- ☐ Is there evidence of damp and mould such as patches on the walls?
- ☐ Are there ways to easily ventilate the property?

Bedrooms

- ☐ Are they all a similar size- if not how will they be allocated between the group?
- ☐ Is there adequate furniture and storage space?
- ☐ Is there a desk to work at?
- ☐ Will the mattress be cleaned before you move in?

Kitchen

- ☐ Are there any signs of mice?
- ☐ Do all of the appliances work?
- ☐ Will crockery, pots and pans be included with the kitchen?
- ☐ Is there enough storage space for everyone?

Bathroom

- ☐ Is there adequate ventilation such as a window or extractor fan?

General

- ☐ What type of heating system is in place?
- ☐ Is there somewhere/facilities to dry the washing?
- ☐ Are there loose cables?
- ☐ Are there smoke alarms?
- ☐ Is there a CO₂ alarm?
- ☐ Is there car parking included, if so, is a permit required?

Contracts and costs

It is important that you understand your contract so that you are clear on all of the costs.

Agency fees

The Tenant Fees Act 2019 places very strict rules on what tenants can and can't be charged for. Accommodation providers/agencies and landlords can only charge for what is known as a permitted payment.

Holding deposits

An example of a permitted payment is a holding deposit. To reserve a property, you may be asked to pay a holding deposit of up to one week's rent. A landlord has up to 14 days to return the holding deposit if they decide not to let the property to you. If you pay a holding deposit and later change your mind about renting the property, a Landlord or accommodation provider may retain some of the deposit arguing that it is to cover reasonable costs.

Tenancy deposits

Most landlords request a deposit, and one month's rent in advance. Tenancy deposits are different to holding deposits. They are sometimes also referred to as security deposits and can be used by the landlord to cover:

- Outstanding rent arrears.
- Damage to the property.

With a joint tenancy you usually have to pay a single deposit for the whole tenancy between you.

From 1 June 2019, if the yearly rent on a property is less than £50,000 a landlord or accommodation provider can only charge up to five weeks' rent.

When signing an assured shorthold tenancy, it is a legal requirement that the property deposit is registered in a government-backed deposit protection scheme, within 30 days of making the payment.

You should be provided with information on how to access the scheme, this is called prescribed information. For more information, visit the UK government website at <https://www.gov.uk/tenancy-deposit-protection>

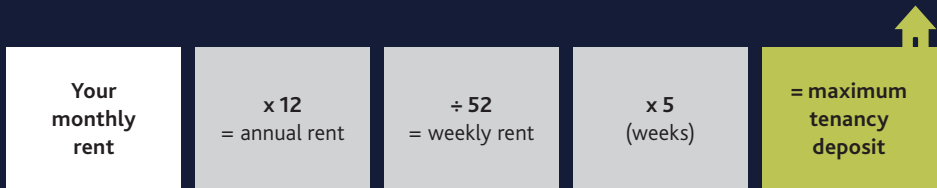
Guarantors

Many landlords/accommodation providers will request that you provide UK- based guarantors who meet their specified criteria. A guarantor is someone who agrees to pay the rent or reimburse any damage costs if you fail to do so.

- For many students, their guarantor might be a family member or a close friend.
- When signing a guarantor agreement, it is best to get it checked first by an advisor.
- Negotiate with the landlord and request that the amount guaranteed is limited to a specified figure.

If you are not able to provide a guarantor you may want to consider going into university residences, where a guarantor is not required. Visit the University's accommodation web pages at www.solent.ac.uk/accommodation for further details.

There are companies who offer to provide a guarantor service in exchange for a fee. While these can be useful (for example if you are an overseas student), the University does not review or approve any such scheme. You can find more information at www.advicenow.org.uk/know-hows/what-do-if-you-can%E2%80%99t-get-guarantor



Tip

When handing over any money, always ensure that you get a receipt and a breakdown of what you have paid for. Try to avoid paying by cash where possible.

Signing a contract

Contracts can be verbal, written or electronic. However, you should always get a contract in writing otherwise it is difficult to prove the agreed terms of the tenancy.

A contract should contain:

- The start and end date.
- The address of the property.
- The name and contact details of the landlord.
- What's included, for example utility bills.
- How to bring the contract to an end and details of the notice period.
- The agreed rental costs

Always ask for a sample contract before signing, and make sure you read it carefully and that you understand it.

If you are not sure about your contract, the University offers a free contract checking service. To book an appointment contact **private.housing@solent.ac.uk**

Important

If it's not in writing, there is no evidence of an agreement.

Remember

you should never feel pressured into signing a housing contract!

Typical types of housing contract

Joint and several liability

If you move into a shared property it is likely that you will sign a contract with joint and several liability.

This means that all of the tenants in the property are equally liable for their own and each other's rent for the duration of the contract. All tenants would also be jointly responsible for observing other conditions, such as maintaining the property, and could be equally liable in the event of any damages.

Sole contract

This is a contract which is only in your name and you are solely responsible for the conditions of the contract.



Proof of your right to rent in the UK

Since February 1 2016, landlords must carry out checks on all tenants to ensure they have the right to rent property in the UK. To do this they must retain copies of certain documents evidencing a tenant's immigration status. Landlords and agencies are required by law to carry out these checks. For further details of landlords' legal obligations please view the <https://www.gov.uk/check-tenant-right-to-rent-documents>.

For most students, you will need to show your passport and provide a photocopy for your landlord to keep. If you don't have a passport, please see the full list of accepted documents. Please do not part with any original identification and ensure you have sufficient copies to provide on viewings.

If a tenant is only allowed to stay in the UK for a limited time, a landlord will need to do the check in the 28 days before the start of the tenancy. Landlords can also check you have a legal entitlement to be in the UK by telephoning a Home Office helpline.

Please note: from July 1 2021, a passport is no longer be considered evidence for EEA students (other than Irish citizens) and you will need to provide additional evidence of lawful immigration status in the UK, in the same way as other foreign nationals. For more information, see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1015175/2021.08.24_RTR_User_Guide.pdf





Solent University
East Park Terrace
Southampton
SO14 0YN

T. +44 (0)23 8201 3000
E. ask@solent.ac.uk

www.solent.ac.uk



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