

Your guide to **looking for accommodation**

All you need to know about house-hunting

Your guide to looking for accommodation

Looking for accommodation might seem like a big challenge, but there is plenty of support available for you.

With planning and care, it need not be stressful. It is important to understand the options available to you, and the rights you have depend on the option you choose.

Relax, take your time, and make a good, informed choice. There are lots of houses available and plenty of time to find a suitable place.

Planning is everything...

Making a well-informed accommodation choice is vitally important, as a poor or hurried choice could mean a difficult year.

Points to consider include:

- Who am I going to live with?
- Where do I want to live?
- How much will it cost?
- What type of property do I want?

Remember:

- Be sure the accommodation is right for you before you commit to taking it - consider price and condition carefully.
- There is enough accommodation available - you are a consumer, and so have rights.
- Be aware that when a group signs a joint contract, everyone is responsible for all the obligations of the tenancy.
- Once you have signed for a fixed-term tenancy, it is extremely difficult to end it early.
- Your deposits must be protected in an authorised Deposit Protection Scheme within 30 days.
- Before you sign a contract, have it checked by the Students' Union Advice Centre.
- When you are asked to pay any money by a landlord/agent:
 - Find out what fees you will need to pay when the contract starts and ends.
 - If you are being asked to pay large sums of money in advance, get external advice.
 - If possible, make the payment by bank transfer and get a proper receipt.

Renting accommodation

Students at Warwick University will generally choose accommodation that falls into one of the following categories:

Privately-rented: assured shorthold tenancy

Most accommodation with a private landlord, where the landlord is not living at the property, will be an assured shorthold tenancy, regardless of what the contract says.

There are certain statutory terms implied in every contract for an assured Shorthold, and these terms cannot be excluded.

The main rights of an **assured shorthold tenancy** are:

- To live in your accommodation for a fixed period of time – for students this is usually for 10-12 months, or it might be a periodic tenancy continuing from month to month.
 - You have a right to certain information when you pay your deposit and at the beginning of the tenancy.
 - You control your home so that you can stop other people from freely entering. If the landlord does not respect this right, s/he might be in breach of your right to quiet enjoyment.
 - There are statutory and common law rights for certain repairs.
 - The landlord cannot force you to leave your accommodation until s/he gets a court order to evict you.
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Warwick Accommodation

In addition to campus accommodation, **Warwick Accommodation** also have 'off campus' managed properties available to all students. There are many advantages to renting a property from Warwick Accommodation, though as a tenant you have less legal protections than renting privately. You can find full details at warwick.ac.uk/accommodation

Private halls of residence

There are a number of private halls of residence available to Warwick students. The type of contract that you will have will depend on the company running the hall. Some offer a licence to occupy (rather like staying in a hotel), while others provide an assured shorthold tenancy.

Living with a landlord

If you either **share accommodation with your landlord**, or **you live in the same building as your landlord and share accommodation with a member of your landlord's family**, then you are likely to be what is known as an 'excluded occupier' and have very limited rights, without the legal protections that most tenants have.

If you start to have problems with your accommodation, it is important that you get advice and find out what your rights are. Generally, as an excluded occupier your only right is to stay until your landlord asks you to go, or for as long as your written agreement/contract says.

Looking for **off-campus accommodation**

Looking for accommodation can be a little daunting, and finding the right housing for the year ahead can make all the difference to your experience as a student.

How to start looking

- Where do you want to live? Coventry, Leamington or Kenilworth?
- Are you looking to rent a house as a group? If so, get the group together and talk about the types of things that are important to everyone. If you differ in opinion, it may be better to form a new group.
- Look for available properties that meet your criteria.
- View as many properties as possible and use the checklist provided to assess the houses' condition.
- If there are people living there, ask questions and find out what they think about living in the property.

Finding a private landlord

Landlords often rent out their properties through agents. It is important to understand what fees you will have to pay, and who is responsible for managing the property. If you are unsure about how your prospective landlord/agent deals with you, think about choosing another one. If the initial contact is not satisfactory, how are they going to treat you if anything goes wrong?

- Talk to other students to find out if they know of a good landlord, or take a walk around the area you want to live in and see which agents are there.
- The Students' Union Advice Centre has info on student-friendly landlords and agents.
- Rooms are advertised on our Housemates Wanted forum at warwicksu.com/housemateswanted.

Where do you want to live?

Warwick University students tend to live in the following areas:

Coventry

There are various areas within Coventry where students to live, for example: Earlsdon, Cannon Park, Canley, Tile Hill (all of which are easily reached from campus).

Kenilworth

A small town about 3 miles from the campus that has lots of amenities and is easily reachable by bus.

Leamington Spa

Very popular with students and with good bus links, but the journey takes about 30 minutes and can be longer at busy times.

Wherever you think you want to live, we recommend you visit the area several times so that you can make an informed decision and choose the location that is right for you.

You've found accommodation – **what happens next?**

Once you have found accommodation that you like, the landlord/agent will expect you to sign the tenancy agreement/contract and pay the deposit. Don't be rushed or pressurised into this:

- Before signing the contract, make sure that you understand it and know what it means. The contract should make sense and be easy to understand.
- Most accommodation will be offered as an assured shorthold tenancy where the landlord will not be living at the property. This type of tenancy gives you the most security of tenure and protection.
- If you have a resident landlord, you will have less protection than if you have an assured shorthold tenancy.

If you have an assured shorthold tenancy, your deposit must be protected within 30 days of you paying it. If you have any questions or need to understand your contract better, make an appointment to see one of the Advisors in the [Students' Union Advice Centre](#).



**The SU Advice Centre
is here to help**

If you have any questions or want your contract checked, please do not hesitate to contact us:

advice@warwicksu.com
02476 572824
warwicksu.com/advice

WARNING!

There are some bad landlords/agents about – ask questions and try to establish if they are going to be fair and honest before you take a property. If you are unsure about their integrity, look for an alternative. A bad landlord/agent can result in stress and impact your ability to study.

Landlords/agents will need to check your identity or visa status as part of the 'Right to Rent' process.

DO NOT LEAVE YOUR PASSPORT WITH ANYONE.

Unfortunately, there are a small number of landlords who take advantage of students and particularly target international students.

If you are experiencing issues with your landlord/agent, please come and talk to someone at the SU Advice Centre.

Signing **accommodation contracts**

When you sign a contract, it forms a legally binding agreement between you and the landlord. The contract is not just the final document but can include all the discussions and information you have been given prior to signing the tenancy agreement. It is possible to have a verbal contract, **but if it is not in writing then it may be hard to prove!**

For more information, see warwicksu.com/housingcontracts

If you want a contract check, please make an appointment to see an SU Advisor.

The following information is for people living in privately-rented accommodation, but not for people living with a resident landlord or in University Accommodation.

Most student accommodation is let for a **fixed period of time** with **no break clause**, which means that once you have signed it, you will have a contractual obligation to pay all the rent for the length of the tenancy.

Before you sign, make sure:

- You have seen the property.
- Your group is one that will 'work' if you are signing a joint tenancy – if someone drops out and stops paying their rent, the remaining tenants will usually be asked to pay it.
- You have read and understood the contract.
- The address, names, dates and amounts to be paid are correct, and it says what you have agreed.
- If the landlord/agent has promised certain work will be done before you move in, make sure the details of the work form part of your contract.
- That **everyone** signing the contract understands it and their obligations.
- Everyone signing the contract must have the right to be in the UK – the landlord is required to conduct Right to Rent Checks by the UK Government before allowing people to move in. For information on this, please see: warwicksu.com/righttorentchecks

Most tenancy agreements are subject to implied terms from statute and common law, which cannot be contracted out of.

Remember:

If you're unsure, don't sign the contract until you have had further advice/information. Don't be pressured into signing.



Once you sign

Before the tenancy starts, the landlord/agent must give you:

- The Government 'How to Rent' Guide.
- An up-to-date gas safety certificate.
- Energy Performance Certificate (there are some exceptions to this rule).

Think about visiting the property again before the contract starts to check its condition.

Deposit protection

Once you have paid your deposit, it must be protected within 30 days with a UK government-backed tenancy deposit scheme (for details of schemes, see warwicksu.com/deposits) and your landlord or agent must provide you with the required information:

- The landlord's name & address.
- The deposit amount paid and the address of the tenancy.
- Information on the tenancy deposit protection scheme including a signed copy of the deposit protection certificate, how to get the deposit back and what happens if there's a dispute.

If the deposit is not protected, there are legal proceedings you can take to make sure this is the case.

If you can't agree deposit deductions with the landlord/agent when you move out, the deposit protection schemes provide mediation or an alternate dispute resolution service.

For more information, see warwicksu.com/deposits

Other things to consider

Agent fees

Only pay a fee to a private agent if you find and rent a property through them – and don't pay too much! Letting agents must also belong to one of three government-approved redress schemes that you can use if the agent fails to solve a complaint.

Can you afford it?

As well as rent, there will be bills on top for heating, insurance, travel costs, internet etc. Draw up a budget of all the likely costs and make sure that it is affordable.

TV Licence

You will need a TV licence if you watch or record live TV on any device. Normally you will need only one licence for the whole house if you are joint tenants and do not have individual contracts – if you are unsure about this, get advice. For more information, see the [TV Licensing website](#).

Water charges

Check who is responsible for paying the water charges. Is it the landlord or you?

Insurance

Make sure your personal possessions are properly insured. Check and see whether your insurance will cover items left in the house when you are away at Christmas or Easter.

How much are you paying?

Work out the total amount of rent you will pay for the property. Very roughly, this should normally be in the range of £2,900 to £4,700 per person for the whole period you are renting. If you are paying more than this, you should be getting exceptional quality and standards.

Fire safety

Try and satisfy yourself that the property is not a fire hazard and that you can safely escape from it if there was a fire. All of the soft furniture must contain fire safety labelling. Integrated smoke alarms and fire door(s) should normally be fitted in larger licensed properties.

Gas safety

Faulty gas appliances can leak carbon monoxide (CO) – which can kill. CO is an odourless, colourless gas which is hard to detect without a CO alarm. Ask if an alarm is installed and look for the clues:

- Sooting or staining on or around appliances.
- Excessive condensation in the room where the appliance is installed.
- Lazy yellow/orange-coloured flame.
- A strange smell when the appliance is on.
- Rusting or water streaking on the appliance, vent or chimney.

Group size

Large groups (7-8 or more) may find it difficult to find a suitable house. We have found that the cost per room for a 4 bedroom house is cheaper than a room in a bigger house, and there are more 4 and 5 bedroom houses available than any other size. Consider splitting a large group and getting two smaller houses close to each other.

Council Tax

As a student you are usually exempt from paying Council Tax, and it is your responsibility to notify the Council that you are exempt. Sometimes landlords/agents will do it for you, but do make sure it gets sorted! For more information, see warwicksu.com/counciltax

Good accommodation and group choices can make the difference between a fantastic or terrible year.

Good luck
house-hunting!

Checklist for inspecting a property

Use this checklist when you go to look at a house - it should help you decide which is the right property for you.

(Why not photocopy a new checklist for each house?)

Exterior of the house

- Is the roof sound and in good repair?
- Are the drains and gutters clear, or do they have plants growing out of them?
- How does the woodwork look?
- Any sign of rot?

Security

- Does the house seem to be secure?
- Is there a burglar alarm?
- Are the locks on the external doors adequate – 5-lever mortice locks?
- Are the external doors solid and secure?
- Would it be difficult to break in?
- Do all the ground-floor windows have security locks?
- Are the window frames strong and in good repair?
- Are the windows double-glazed? This is important as it will affect heating costs.
- Are the ground-floor curtains lined or thick enough to stop people seeing in?

Heating and plumbing

- Does the house have central heating?
- Does the heating system work efficiently?
- How much does it cost to run the heating?
- Do any taps, pipes or toilets leak, and how effective is the shower?

Electrical safety

- Does the electrical wiring and fuse box look modern and well-maintained?
- Is there a recent Electrical Inspection Certificate for the property?
- Are there enough power points in each room?

Gas safety

- Is there a current Gas Safety Certificate for the house? Look for the Gas Safe mark.
- Is a carbon monoxide detector fitted?

Fire safety

- In the event of a fire, could you escape easily?
- Are smoke detectors fitted?



For more information
or to print a checklist, visit
warwicksu.com/housing

Furniture

- Does the house have enough furniture for everyone?
- Are there enough beds, chairs, tables, desks etc?
- Is the kitchen big enough to store and prepare food?
- Which items of furniture belong to the current tenants?

Money

- How much is the rent and how does it compare with other properties? What is the total amount you will pay?
- Who pays the water charges?
- How much is the deposit, and is it protected in a Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme?
- Is there an Agent's Fee? How much?
- Are there any other charges?

Licensed HMO

- Check if the property needs to be licensed
- Visit warwicksu.com/advice/housing/offcampusaccommodation/ for more information



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ADVICE
CENTRE

The Students' Union Advice Centre is **here to help**

If you have any questions or want your contract checked, please do not hesitate to contact us:

advice@warwicksu.com

02476 572824

warwicksu.com/advice

We hope you have a happy and successful year!

Useful **contacts:**

Campus Contacts

SU Advice Centre:

02476 572824

warwicksu.com/advice

University International Office:

02476 523706

warwick.ac.uk/services/international

Local Authorities

Warwick District Council:

01926 410410

warwickdc.gov.uk

Coventry City Council:

08085 834333

coventry.gov.uk

