
DURHAM STUDENTS' UNION



FREE
GUIDE

GUIDE
TO LIVING
OUT IN THE
COMMUNITY

CONTENTS

Moving out of college accommodation and into the community is an exciting time and will hopefully enrich your experiences as students. Our guide will help you to understand what some of your rights and responsibilities are as private tenants and help you make the most of your time.

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BEFORE YOU MOVE IN

Read your contract

It may be some time since you read your contract. This is a good opportunity to have another look and familiarise yourself with what is included.

If you paid a **security deposit** when you signed your contract, you should also have received confirmation that this has been protected by a relevant scheme within 30 days - *(One tenant is protected by the security deposit - usually the 'lead tenant' if designated by the landlord or the first person to sign the contract.)*.

Talk to your housemates

This is also a great opportunity for you to meet up with your new housemates to discuss how you are going to organise moving into the house, whether some of you will be moving in straight away or not, and how you pay for the bills. Meeting up before you move in will hopefully set some ground-rules for you all; allowing you to relax and enjoy your time in the house together.

My landlord agreed to carry out some repairs/ improvements to the property during the summer - do we need to do anything?

Ideally any agreed repairs/improvements should have been included as part of your contract. If you are unable to live in the property for a significant period of time, you should be offered some form of discount/rent-free period.



A timescale should have also been mutually agreed, with an agreement that if the work is not completed on schedule you will be compensated accordingly.

If you have not got anything agreed in writing, email your landlord now to confirm that you have agreed for work to be carried out on the house in your absence, but would like further information as to what would happen in the event of the work not being completed before moving in.

Bills

Check your contract to see which bills you are responsible for. These could include gas, electricity, internet, water rates and a TV licence. If you are considering changing utility suppliers for your gas, electric or internet, comparison web pages can be a good place to start looking, to see whether you can save money.

Contents insurance

We would advise you to consider getting contents insurance for your personal possessions so that they are protected if they get damaged or stolen. Please see the following [guide](#) for more information, or for a quote checkout [Endsleigh's Student Insurance](#).



Not moving in at the start of the tenancy period?

You must inform your landlord if you are not intending to move into the property until after the tenancy starts and make sure that an appointment is scheduled for your arrival. If you do not do this the landlord may assume that you are happy with the contents of the property as it is and send out an inventory that will then be difficult to challenge. If one tenant moves in before the others, then that person will take responsibility for the house at that point

MOVING IN

○ COLLECT THE KEYS

To both the front and back doors, it might sound obvious but check that they work as well!



○ CARRY OUT AN INVENTORY

When you move into your new home, check and agree a detailed inventory with your landlord. This can help with any disputes when you move out and could help you get your tenancy deposit back. Report any damage or broken items. If you take photographs ensure that they are digitally dated. If your landlord does not provide you with an inventory use our sample and ask your landlord to sign this.



If they refuse, get a friend to sign it instead and keep it as evidence.

○ MAKE SURE YOU KNOW HOW THINGS WORK

If you are not sure how facilities like the heating, washing machine or burglar alarm work, ask your landlord. Beware if you misuse or damage something you could be held liable for the cost of repairing or replacing the item.



○ ASK THE LANDLORD FOR AN EMERGENCY CONTACT

Make sure you have emergency contact numbers for the landlord as well as providing them with up-to-date contact information for you and your housemates!



○ BILLS

Ask the landlord to show you where the meters are and how to read them to enable you to give accurate readings to your utility providers. It is important that everyone in the group sets some money aside each month to settle the bills. We advise that all housemates are named on the account. If only one person is named on the bill this will be the only person who will be held responsible by the company.



Don't delay: the internet can take some time to set up!



○ COUNCIL TAX

Full-time students are usually exempt from paying council tax. Obtain an exemption certificate from the Student Registry website and either give to your landlord or send to the council.

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LIVING IN THE PROPERTY

Safety

Landlords have legal obligations to ensure the safety of tenants. They must get a gas safety certificate for every appliance in the property and have this available for tenants to view, ensure furniture meets fire safety standards, and ensure electrical equipment provided is safe.

Often tenants are required to test alarms, change batteries (in battery operated smoke alarms) and to inform the landlord if the alarms stop working. Your landlord must have at least one smoke alarm installed on every storey of the property and a carbon monoxide alarm in any room containing a solid fuel burning appliance (e.g. a coal fire, wood burning stove).



Make sure that you act responsibly by keeping fire doors shut, not leaving pans unattended on the hob, not burning candles and ensuring that you do not block your access so that you can all leave the house quickly if there is a fire.

Property security

It is essential that you make sure that you secure your property each time you go out, so the landlord cannot hold you responsible for any damage or theft to the property whilst you are absent.

- Ensure that you have closed windows and doors and set any burglar alarm;
- Close curtains and blinds, especially on the ground floor;
- Make sure you can't see any valuable items when looking through the windows;
- Avoid putting adverts or posters up that show you're in a student property;
- Ensure you protect your important items, like laptops and phones, with suitable contents insurance. We recommend you visit Endsleigh for a quote.

If you are leaving the property for some time inform your landlord and neighbours that you will not be there. We would suggest that you take valuable items with you. Timer switches for your lights are a useful and easy way of creating the impression that someone is in the house.

During the winter months, avoid frozen or burst pipes by leaving the heating on low or timed for a few hours each morning and evening.

Personal safety

A fun social life is all part of the university experience but it is important that you take responsibility for yourself. Here are some simple steps you can take to stay safe when out, especially at night:

- Let someone know where you are going;
- Plan ahead and know how you are going to get home at the end of a night out;
- Take a mobile phone with you;
- Ensure you have the numbers of some local taxi firms;
- Do not walk home alone or let others do so;
- Carry a personal alarm with you;
- Use the [Students' Union NightBus](#) service in Durham City



Housing repairs

Your landlord has obligations to keep your property in good condition and to repair any items that may become damaged. As tenants you must report any damage as soon as possible or you may be held responsible. Please see our guide to [Housing Repairs](#) for more information.

Rubbish and recycling

The County Council usually collect rubbish one week and recycling the next week. Bins usually have to be out by 07:00 on the day of collection and they will not usually pick up any extra

bags that do not fit into the bin.

You can find out when your collection day is by visiting:

- o If you live in [Durham City](#)
- o If you live in [Stockton-On-Tees](#)

Make sure you only put your bags and bins out on the day of collections as you could be fined by the council. Leaving bags out for long periods looks unsightly and can attract vermin.

Recycling your rubbish will not only assist the environment but will help you manage your rubbish more effectively. The following guides will provide you with more information about what goes in each bin:

- o If you live in [Durham City](#)
- o If you live in [Stockton-On-Tees](#)



Living out in the community: be respectful!

As a member of Durham University you have responsibilities towards your neighbours and community as a whole. You will sign a [code of conduct](#) and could be subject to the University's disciplinary procedures if a serious complaint is made against you.

- o Be aware of the noise you make both inside your house and out in the garden. When groups gather in gardens to talk the noise echoes further than you think. If your neighbours work, have young children or are retired they will have very different schedules to you, so being sensitive to their needs will help you to get along;
- o Let them know if you intend to have a party, whether in the day or night. If you make excessive noise well into the night the police may be called. Your contract might also state that you cannot make noise over certain times and if a complaint is made against you your landlord may fine you;
- o Playing games in the street may also cause distress to your neighbours or damage to cars/property.

If you want to be more involved in the community, [Student Community Action](#) gives you opportunities to enrich your living out experience while also enhancing your CV. Or why not join your local residents' association?

What if I am experiencing problems with noise?

If you are experiencing noise from your neighbours contact the Police at the time of the incident on their non-emergency number 101. If there is a recurring issue please contact the Advice Service for further support.

MOVING OUT

Moving out and doing it well is just as important as moving in! We suggest you take the following steps to ensure that things go as smoothly as possible;

- o Make sure you move out by the last day of your contract - if you remain in the house for just one day after your contract has expired, your landlord may argue that you have created a new tenancy and you could be liable for the rent!
- o Clean! You are expected to leave the house in the same state that you found it in.
- o Attend any check-out appointment that has been arranged, or arrange an appointment yourself with the landlord to go through the inventory and check everything is in order.
- o Take meter readings for all your utilities and inform the providers that you will be moving out on a specified date;
- o Get rid of your rubbish: [Greenspace](#), Durham University's Environment Office coordinates initiatives across Durham so that students can recycle items at the end of their tenancies. If you leave any rubbish behind your landlord may deduct the cost of having to remove this from your deposit.
- o Liaise with your landlord regarding return of your deposit. If you experience any difficulties with this, please contact the Advice Service for support.



For more information or advice regarding living out please visit our housing advice webpages. If you would like to speak to a member of our team, please get in touch [here](#).
