

33. ACCOMMODATION COSTS

How much are halls of residence rents?

The price of university accommodation depends on the type of rooms available and whether you choose catered or self-catering halls. Most universities now have a selection of accommodation to suit all tastes and budgets and many institutions give first choice and priority to first year students.

Perhaps surprisingly, accommodation costs do not vary a great deal in different geographical locations. Instead, they vary between *types* of accommodation and the facilities available. To give you an idea of how much you can expect to pay for different types of accommodation consult the following tables. All prices are based on 2011/12 levels.

UNIVERSITY IN THE SOUTH OF ENGLAND

	Large halls of residence off campus	University-owned house	Purpose built halls on campus
Number of rooms	188	8	298
Weekly rent	£92 - £96	£104	£127 - £156
Internet access	no	no	yes
En-suite	no	n/a	yes

UNIVERSITY IN THE MIDLANDS

	Individual student flats	Large hall of residence off campus	Small halls of residence on campus
Number of rooms	165	321	50
Weekly rent	£115 - £135	£78 - £121	£81
Internet access	unspecified	partial	no
En-suite	yes	some en-suite	no

In general, rent covers heating, lighting and water. Some rents will also include cleaning although, increasingly, students are expected to clean their own rooms. If you have chosen a catered hall some universities will include the cost of meals in the overall price, whereas others will require you to buy an additional meal card (see Chapter 34). Make sure that you understand what is included in the cost before signing your contract.

How much is private rented accommodation?

Private accommodation rents vary considerably over the country and within specific areas of towns and cities. If you choose to live in a fashionable part of the city the amount of rent could be twice as much as it would be in a less fashionable area.

Most towns and cities have areas within them that are popular with students. These tend to be areas of terraced houses that can provide rooms for four to eight students in each property, located within walking distance of the college or university. In general, you can expect to pay the following weekly rent for this type of property:

- London £85 - £145
- Leeds £59 - £85
- Newcastle £50 - £67
- Southampton £60 - £87

Obviously, the more you shop around the better deal you are likely to get. In some popular student areas properties might be advertised from as early as January for the autumn term, so you have to begin looking early.

What other costs are incurred if I choose private rented accommodation?

Deposits

Most landlords will ask for a deposit to protect them against any damage that might occur to their property. The Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme has been introduced in an attempt to protect deposits from being unfairly withheld by landlords. If you are asked to pay a deposit the price usually ranges from £250 - £400 or is equivalent to the rent for one month. This deposit has to be paid before you move into the property and the landlord must provide you with details of the deposit scheme that is to be used within 14 days of the start of the tenancy agreement.

Letting agency fees

Letting agencies are not allowed to charge a registration fee for finding accommodation. However, they can make a charge once a client has accepted accommodation so before you use the agency you should find out how much this charge is likely to be. All universities have an accommodation office that will help you to find accommodation that is suitable for students, so in most cases you will not need to use an outside letting agent.

Retainers and reduced rents

In popular student areas, or if accommodation is in short supply, you might be asked to pay a retainer to keep the property over the summer. If you do this you must obtain an agreement signed by you and the landlord and get a receipt for any money you pay. This should stop the landlord giving the property to someone else at the beginning of term.

Is it cheaper to live in halls or in private accommodation?

This is a question often asked by students and unfortunately there is no definitive answer. Some students will find it cheaper to live in halls whereas others will find it cheaper to live in private rented accommodation. However, most students choose to live in halls for their first year away as this provides a safe environment and companionship with many other students. It eases you into university life. After the first year, when you have made friends, you can decide who you would like to live with and go house-hunting together. You can then work together to reduce costs (see below).

How can I reduce accommodation costs?

Once you have decided what type of accommodation would best suit you there are a number of ways to reduce your expenditure.

If you have chosen to live in a hall of residence consider the following points.

- Think carefully about what facilities you really need. Do you actually need internet access in your room? All colleges and universities have open access computers spread over campus and many halls have computer rooms available to all residents. Do you really need en-suite facilities? If you don't have these facilities you will be sharing with five other students – is that really so bad? Some of the cheaper halls can have other advantages such as proximity to college. A shorter walk in the morning might outweigh the advantages provided by a launderette, for example. Don't automatically assume that expensive accommodation will be the best.
- If you have a car check that you are not expected to pay for parking in your hall of residence car-park. More and more universities are charging for car-parking.
- Make sure that you eat all meals that you have paid for (see Chapter 34).

If you have chosen to live in private rented accommodation consider the following points.

- Shop around for the cheapest deals. Do your research. Find out which are the best student areas and obtain some sample rents. However, you must make sure that you move to a safe area. Your students' union or accommodation office will be able to offer advice on which areas to avoid.
- Choose to move in with like-minded people. Think about whether it is wise to move in with people from wealthy backgrounds as they will not have to watch the pennies or understand the need to budget. It could lead to arguments and problems with your spending when you have to split bills equally.
- If you have a car make sure that you can park near to your house and that there is not a charge for this parking. Some areas may have a residents' parking scheme that could cost you around £50 a year. Parking fines are expensive so don't live in an area where you might be tempted to park illegally.
- Move in with other full-time students and you will be exempt from paying council tax (see Chapter 45).

Is there any financial aid available to help me pay for accommodation?

Some universities offer accommodation vouchers or cheaper accommodation for students living in halls of residence as part of their bursary package (see Chapter 19). Contact the university in which you are interested for more information.

Where can I find more information?

Contact the accommodation office of your chosen university for an accommodation list, prices and an application form. Useful information about accommodation will also be available on the university website.