living out guide
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Introduction

Hello, and welcome to OUSU Living Out Guide!

Living out is a great opportunity to have more freedom (and dinner parties) than is possible in college, but it can also be daunting, especially if you have never lived out in Oxford. This guide is intended to cover all the main questions and issues that people face when looking for accommodation, and to direct you to sources of more detailed information. The issues included are based on student requests: you can take it as a good sign if some things seem obvious!

The most important message we can give you is this: TAKE YOUR TIME! There is plenty of accommodation in Oxford, and many students (particularly graduates who got late offers) find a home after the academic year has already begun. Get advice before making major decisions, and don’t rush into anything. There is more information on the OUSU website, and there is a directory of helpful organisations at the back of this guide. You can also contact the Student Advice Service (advice@ousu.org) and the University’s Accommodation Office (01865 280811) for help and advice.

It doesn’t happen often, but if anything does go wrong, there are many sources of help so you needn’t face it alone (as you’ll see when you read the guide). For most students, there will be no problems and living out will be a fun and exciting experience.

Good luck!

Disclaimer

Whilst OUSU has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this guide at the time of printing, OUSU cannot be held responsible for any mistakes herein, nor for the consequences of any action taken as a result of reading this guide. If you have any questions about the guide, please contact the Vice-President (Welfare and Equal Opportunities), on welfare@ousu.org.

Additional copies

If you would like additional copies of this guide, please contact the Vice-President (Welfare and Equal Opportunities) at OUSU, on 01865-(2)88461, or email welfare@ousu.org.

Alternative Formats

This guide is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the VP (Welfare and Equal Opportunities) at OUSU on 01865-(2)88461 or welfare@ousu.org.
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Step 1: initial decisions

Do you want to live out?

Many students have no choice about whether or not they want to be in college-owned accommodation for all or part of their degree. If you do have a choice, there are many things to consider when deciding whether or not to live out.

Costs

Total rent
Monthly rent in college tends to be higher than rent if you live out, but you typically only have to pay it for about 6 - 7 months of the year (this won’t be the case for graduates or those in couples’ accommodation). It’s difficult to get a lease for less than 12 months if you are living out. Before making a comparison, check to see if college uses ‘bands’ of payments for rooms of different quality.

Additional costs
If you live out, you will also have to pay bills (water, gas, electricity, internet, phone, TV licence, repairs), so these will need to be factored in. However, living in college can also entail such costs: does college have extra charges for your internet connection, phone line, kitchen, or other amenities?

Hidden costs
There are far fewer of these with college (you won’t have to pay for credit checks, leave a deposit, or face punitive costs for end-of-year cleaning).

Vacations
If you need to be in Oxford outside of term time, it can be less hassle if you live out. You won’t have the extra costs of vacation residence, or the hassle of moving in and out throughout the year. If you are planning to live out for more than a year and want to avoid upheaval (e.g., if you have children), check to see how long you can be sure of having college accommodation – it may be less disruptive to live out.
Utilities
If you live in college, you (probably) won’t have to arrange and keep track of bills for water, internet, gas and electricity.

Cooking for yourself
It can be a lot of hassle to go to Hall if you live out, and you probably won’t do it very often. If you aren’t very good at cooking, or don’t like it, you may find you eat out and take away more often, so adjust for this cost. However, do try to go to Hall – it’s an excellent way to catch up with friends still living in college.

Travel
Living out almost certainly means you’ll be further from college or your department, but there are many amenities to consider when calculating the relative inconvenience: labs, libraries, main shops, nurseries/schools, clubs/sports fields/river and grocery shops. However, buses (and taxis!) are not cheap, and you’ll need to go into the city centre often.

Day-to-day living

Security and safety
College and college-owned accommodation are usually safer, insofar that they have porters and CCTV, and usually have stronger security measures for individual buildings (locks on ground floor windows, etc).

Repairs and maintenance
Colleges are (usually) quick with these and it takes minimal effort on our part. Letting agencies/landlords can take longer, and there will be higher expectations of how much you do.

Cleaning
It won’t be long before you miss your scout (room cleaner), but at least you won’t have early-morning wake-up calls, which is nice!

Social aspects

Privacy
You won’t have much of it in a shared house. On the plus side, you’ll probably be sharing with friends.

Parties/entertaining
College rooms are much less flexible for this, in terms of space and college regulations. Living out is great for dinner parties (and noisier events, provided you respect your neighbours’ need for some quiet).
Who should you live with?

Choose your housemates carefully: a thoughtfully declined offer from a friend will harm your friendship less than a tense year of living together. In particular, bear in mind that most tenancies are ‘jointly and severally liable.’ This means that you are legally bound together for the duration of the tenancy, so it is difficult to move out, or chuck someone out, if living together becomes unbearable.

The following is a list of common areas where difference can lead to tension. If you are unsure about how well suited a group is, spend some time considering these and discuss them with potential housemates.

- **Smoking**: Do you smoke? Do they?
- **Drinking**: Do you drink? Do they? How much, and how often?
- **Social habits**: Do you stay up late doing work? Where do you do most of your work (room or library)? Do you go out at night often? It can be lonely if you’re the only one who tends to work at home, or if you tend to go out less than the others.
- **Work habits**: How do you prefer to work - regularly popping into others for chat and breaks, or four solid hours locked in your room? What about them?
- **Coping with conflict**: Are you comfortable with tension and being frank, or do you prefer to suffer in silence? Would you be able to approach anyone in the group if you were unhappy with their habits? What about others – will they be able to cope if you’re very open about problems?
- **Social space and parties**: In college, do you tend to have people into your room a lot? Do they? This will give a hint as to how often the house will be full or be a quiet space.
- **Partners**: If some of your friends are in relationships, will you be OK with there effectively being another person living in the house? How do you feel about living with a couple (and their PDAs)? Do you, or they, have an active (and audible) love life? And what would you do if they break up? This is especially pertinent if you (and they) are in an exam year, as tempers will be running higher than usual.
- **Cleaning**: Are you tidy or untidy? Clean or messy? What about them? Do you know how to clean? Do they?
- **Hygiene**: What can you put up with (or what would you inflict on others)? At the worst end of the scale, would you ever use the sink for being sick or as a loo? Would they? Less extreme, and more common: how long do you wait before washing the dishes? What about them?
- **Money**: Are there big differences in how much money different members of the group have? There might be potential for conflict over the size/quality/location of house, communal food in the house, decorating, heating, getting a TV, etc. There can also be resentment if some housemates can afford to go to restaurants/clubs more than others. It’s good to consider them in advance and decide if it’s an issue for you.
- **Non-students**: If you have the option of living with someone who is not a student (e.g. because they have taken a year out), you might be able to get a nicer house (because you won’t be restricted to the student housing lists). However, you will be liable for Council Tax!
What do you want from a house?

Before you can decide what you want from a house, you’ll need to calculate your ideal expenditure range per month for ‘house things’ (e.g. rent, utilities). Then decide on the absolute maximum you can afford to spend per month on living out (for more details on typical living costs, see the OUSU website).

**Considerations:**
- (Minimum) number of bedrooms
- Size and quality of social space
- Minimum number of toilets
- Minimum number of bathing facilities
- Shower or bath
- Proximity to grocery shops
- Proximity to bus routes
- Proximity to college/libraries..

**Do you care about having a...?**
- Clean/modern house (particularly bathroom and kitchen)
- Big garden
- Nice garden
- Bicycle rack
- (Decent) oven
- Microwave/Dishwasher
- Tumble dryer
- Washing machine
- Spare room
- Lots of storage space.

N.B When picturing your dream house, be sure to distinguish between ‘must have’ and ‘would like to have’
Step 2: choose an area

(For maps of areas go to the OUSU website: www.ousu.org)

City Centre

The benefits of a house in the city centre are obvious, but you’ll be hard-pressed to find one! However, security can be an issue as, unlike college, you don’t have a 24-hour security system and CCTV. Yours is also likely to become the venue of choice before and after nights out!

Jericho

One of the most popular areas in Oxford, the houses here are (usually) a little nicer, but the prices typically reflect this. There is a good range of entertainment options, such as restaurants and a cinema, but fewer options for grocery shopping (there is a ‘metro’-sized Co-op). It is reasonably convenient for the science area and the Maths Institute.

Cowley Road

Often erroneously referred to as ‘Cowley’ (which is much further away), this area is also one of the most popular with students. Houses here are less expensive than in Jericho, there are frequent buses to the High Street and there are many grocery stores, shops, take-aways and restaurants to choose from. Another benefit is that OxEMS (24-hour emergency medical services) is located on the Cowley Road, as are other essential services. The main grocery store is a Tesco Metro, but there are many smaller greengrocers and butchers (including a Halal butcher). It’s not particularly convenient for any of the University departments or buildings.
Iffley Road

South of the Cowley Road, this area has fewer shops and amenities (other than small-ish newsagents), the main ones being those on the Cowley Road. Buses are quite frequent, and the location is great if you play a lot of sport.

Botley Road

This is less popular, with house prices that reflect this, but it’s not a bad area. There are medium-sized newsagents for basic shopping, and it’s very convenient for the train station, Business School and slightly closer to Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street than other areas…

Abingdon Road

Like the Botley Road area, this is less popular and so has lower prices. It’s a fairly quiet area, but has a few newsagents dotted along it. Convenient for some college sports fields and – if you live further down – is near to a Sainsburys superstore. Buses are frequent.

Summertown

If you don’t care about being close to the city centre, this is a nice area with (mostly) good quality houses. There is a good range of shops, but typically prices to match, as it’s not a very ‘studenty’ area.
Headington

A great location for students who need to be near the John Radcliffe hospital but it’s not an easy trip back from town (due to a fairly steep hill) except by bus. However, buses are quite frequent and Headington ‘village’ has an Iceland, Waitrose and Co-Op, all of which are sizeable. Prices are much lower than for houses near the city centre.
Step 3: look for houses

Places to look

- College housing (if it’s available).
- The University Land Agent’s and Accommodation Office: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/accommodation. This office is responsible for the letting and management of University Housing. They have various sites and properties throughout Oxford, ranging from study bedrooms to purpose built sites housing singles, couples and families.
  - Contact: 01865 (2)80811. If you are looking for SINGLES housing, either University or private, for graduates please contact: janet.mead@admin.ox.ac.uk. If you are looking for COUPLES & FAMILIES housing, either University or private, for graduates please contact: susannah.brady@admin.ox.ac.uk.
  - If you are a tenant and you want to contact the Graduate Housing Office please contact graduate.housing@admin.ox.ac.uk.
  - Graduate Housing Accounts: accounts.graduatehousing@admin.ox.ac.uk.
- Letting agencies - There are many of these in Oxford – check ‘Research Letting Agencies’ section below, for guidance on charges and contact details.
- Daily Information – paper ads and the website: www.dailyinfo.co.uk.
- Newspapers, such as the Oxford Mail: www.oxfordmail.co.uk.
- Notices in newsagents
Listings on websites and forums - these are especially helpful for first-year graduates who have late offers: [www.easyroommate.com](http://www.easyroommate.com) and the room listings on [www.gumtree.com](http://www.gumtree.com) are particularly helpful.

Lastly, if your heart is set on a particular area, walk around and call agencies as you see houses with signs!

### Getting more detailed information

Your landlord and/or letting agent will play quite a big role in your experience of living out – a good landlord makes life much easier! Therefore, it is important that you get more 'subjective' information about who should be avoided (unfortunately, it is difficult to publicly publish information about ‘bad’ landlords, as there is a legal risk).

**Key places to look are:**
- Students in the years above, or students who have lived out before
- Those who live in the house(s) that interest you.

**Key things to ask about:**
- The condition of the house when they arrived
- Helpfulness of the landlord/agency when dealing with minor requests
- Helpfulness and promptness when dealing with large problems (e.g. broken heating)
- Any difficulties they had with getting the deposit back.

### Research Letting Agents

It’s important to ‘hunt out’ more information about an agency before committing yourself to a house – but the information below should help for avoiding shocks early on. **N.B This is not a complete list of agencies in Oxford, just a few of the main ones used by students.**

**James C Penny**
- **Administration Fee:** £100pp plus VAT
- **Deposit:** 1.5 x calendar months rent
- **Checkout:** No
- **Other charges:** One months rent up front at the start of your tenancy
- **Date List Published:** End of December
- **Contact Details:** 01865 554 422
- **Website:** [www.jamescpenny.co.uk](http://www.jamescpenny.co.uk)
- **Location:** Walton Street

**Beckmann Lettings**
- **Administration Fee:** £100pp inc. VAT
- **Deposit:** 1 months rent
- **Checkout:** No
- **Other charges:** No
- **Date List Published:** December
- **Contact Details:** 01865 723 743
- **Website:** [www.beckmann-property.co.uk](http://www.beckmann-property.co.uk)
- **Location:** Near the Clarendon Centre

**Hutton Parker**
- **Administration Fee:** £95pp plus VAT
- **Deposit:** £525
- **Checkout:** No
- **Other charges:** 1 months rent up front
- **Date List Published:** 1* December
- **Contact Details:** 01865 728 999
- **Website:** [www.hutton-parker.co.uk](http://www.hutton-parker.co.uk)
- **Location:** St. Clements

**The Lettings Shop**
- **Administration Fee:** £100pp plus VAT
- **Deposit:** 1 months rent plus retainer
- **Checkout:** No
- **Other charges:** Retainer paid up front of £100 per bedroom
- **Date List Published:** Late December
- **Contact Details:** 01865 796 609
- **Website:** [www.lettingshopoxford.co.uk](http://www.lettingshopoxford.co.uk)
- **Location:** High Street
North Oxford Property Services
Administration Fee: £135pp inc. VAT
Deposit: One month plus retainer
Checkout: £50 plus VAT (taken from your deposit)
Other charges: Retainer paid up front of £150 per person
Date List Published: 10th/11th December
Contact Details: 01865 318 533
Website: www.north-oxford-property.co.uk
Location: 47 Walton Street

Finders Keepers Student
Administration Fee: £100pp plus VAT
Deposit: 2 months rent
Checkout: £40 plus VAT
Other charges: Holding fee of £100 per person, given back in your first months rent if you return your guarantor form and references on time.
First months rent is payable up front.
Date List Published: 10th December
Contact Details: 01865 260111
Website: www.fkstudentletting.co.uk
Location: St. Clements
References: Any previous landlord and Personal Tutor

Chancellors
Administration Fee: £149pp inc. VAT
Deposit: 6 weeks rent
Checkout: £40- £125 (size dependent)
Other charges: No
Date List Published: Early December
Contact Details: 01865 723 557
Website: www.chancellors.co.uk
Location: Cowley Road

Lucy Properties
Administration Fee: No fees
Deposit: 1.5 months rent
Checkout: No
Other charges: No
Date List Published: January
Contact Details: 01865 559 973
Website: www.lucyproperties.co.uk
Location: Walton Well Road

Research Landlords

The City Council has recently introduced an Accreditation Scheme for landlords who have signed up to the standards within the scheme. However, this should not be taken as a ‘seal of approval’ – just confirmation that basic standards have been met. You should still exercise all the usual caution about choosing your landlord and house. If you are renting with a landlord (as opposed to a property that is managed by an agency), it is worth ringing the City Council to see if they have signed up to the Accreditation Scheme. For more information about the Accreditation Scheme, please visit the City Council website and search for ‘Landlord Accreditation Scheme.’
Step 4: go on viewings

Three important things you should do when looking at a house:

1. **TAKE YOUR TIME!** This applies to each house you view, as well as when making the overall choice about a house. Don’t be embarrassed to quiz the landlord, to go through everything on your checklist, and to look at everything thoroughly. You’ll be stuck with the house for a year – don’t regret that you didn’t spend five minutes on finding out more.

2. **Note down any changes you want made,** and agree on any repairs or redecorations BEFORE you pay or sign anything. If they’re not in writing and agreed before then, you will have almost no leverage, and limited legal recourse.

3. **Quiz the current tenants if they’re in.** Ask for privacy, so that they can be honest with you. At the very least, ask about the landlord/letting agency, any problems or glitches with the house, and the area.
Warning signs

*Alarm bells should be ringing if the landlord or agent:*

- Asks (or tells!) you to put down money that isn’t the official deposit
- Wants personal details or money just to secure a viewing
- Puts pressure on you to take the house
- Is evasive with questions about repairs
- Blocks you from speaking to the current tenants.

These might not mean you definitely shouldn’t go with them, but you should be extra-cautious.

Checklist for houses

At the back of this guide you will find a blank checklist which you can take with you when visiting houses. This can also be found on the OUSU website. The list is detailed, but many of the items are essential for ensuring your security and quality or the basic integrity and safety of the house. You should also ask when maintenance was last done on electrical equipment, plumbing, etc.
Step 5: get your house: forms & fees

When discussing forms and fees, undertake as much as you can in writing or by email, so that you can refer back to them if you feel things aren’t correct. Make sure to get a receipt for every payment you make to your landlord or letting agent, and ensure that housemates do the same. You will need these if there are disputes about how much was paid, or when.

The administration fee(s)

Credit check
Landlords and letting agencies run credit checks (and, sometimes, tenant screenings) to check that you are likely to pay all of your rent. The check is usually done through a CRA (Credit Rating Agency), which will look for history of – for example – bankruptcy and non-payment of bills or rent. The landlord or agency will typically charge you for this, to cover their costs in performing the check. However, the charge made varies, so you may want to bear it in mind when choosing the agency. The cost of checks for major agencies is listed in ‘Step 3: Research Letting Agents.’

Drawing up the contract
Many agencies and landlords will charge for the cost of the tenancy agreement, as it is a legal document. As with the credit checks, the cost of these are listed in ‘Step 3: Research Letting Agents.’ If you are viewing a house not in this list, or with a ‘smaller’ landlord, it is worth enquiring when you are arrange viewings.
The deposit

The purpose of a deposit is to confirm that you will be a tenant (i.e. to make it worthwhile for the agent or landlord to take the house off the market while they process the credit check and tenancy agreement), and to cover any potential damage to the house (e.g. to pre-empt the cost of hiring a cleaner if the tenants do not leave the house in a fit state). The deposit is typically equivalent to a month’s rent, or 150% of a month’s rent. Make sure you get a receipt for the payment of the deposit.

IMPORTANT: Do not pay a deposit unless you have confirmation that it will be protected in line with the Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme. Your landlord is legally obliged to conform to it. This is a scheme whereby deposits are held separately from other money held by the landlord or agency. It ensures that you will receive your deposit (or the proportion of it to which you are entitled) at the end of your tenancy and also has a clear and fair system for resolving disputes about how much should be returned. For more information about Tenancy Deposit Protection Schemes, see the OUSU website.

The guarantor form

This will usually be required when someone can’t demonstrate that they have regular income of their own (e.g. because they are a student). It is a form whereby someone agrees that they will cover costs (e.g. missed rent, or damage to the property) if the tenant fails to do so. Most students ask a parent or guardian to fulfil this role. Make sure to get their permission before they are sent the form by the letting agent/landlord!

The tenancy agreement

The tenancy agreement is a written or verbal contract between you and your landlord/letting agent. The tenancy agreement grants certain rights to both you and your landlord/letting agent. For example, it might outline your right to live in the accommodation, what repairs are your responsibility, the landlord’s right to receive rent for letting the accommodation and the date you will vacate the property.

Any arrangements you make will be part of the tenancy agreement. Additionally, both you and your landlord have rights and responsibilities defined by law. The tenancy agreement can give both you and your landlord more than your statutory rights, but cannot give you less than your statutory rights (see Step 6 and Step 8 for more on your rights). If a term in the tenancy agreement gives either you or your landlord less than your statutory rights, that term cannot be enforced.

The tenancy agreement may be written or oral; in England a landlord is not legally bound to provide you with a written agreement (but you should do your best to secure one). Whether or not there is a written agreement, your landlord is legally bound to supply you with their name and address.

As of March 2007, all tenancies are an assured short hold tenancy (with a small number of exceptions). An assured short hold tenancy means you are secure for the period of the agreement but do not have long-term tenancy rights.
For more details about assured tenancy, resident landlords (where you share living accommodation with your landlord) and protected tenants, see Oxford City Council’s ‘Guide for Private Tenants’ (available on their website or from OUSU).

**Be sure to:**
- Get a written copy of the agreement.
- Get an electronic copy.
- Have a copy of the agreement for each member of the house.
- Read through the agreement thoroughly before signing – do you understand all of it? Are you satisfied by all the terms in it?
- Insist that it be in plain language. It is a consumer contract and should therefore be easy to understand.
- Challenge any terms that would enable the landlord to change the agreement unilaterally. Seek advice if you think such a term is in your agreement.
- Think about all eventualities (fire, damage to the front door due to theft, etc). Does the tenancy agreement give clear responsibilities?

**Insist that your tenancy agreement includes:**
- The terms and type of your tenancy.
- When the tenancy ends.
- How much notice either party must give for the tenancy to be terminated.
- Who else can enter the property, and on what terms.
- Your landlord’s obligations for repairing the property.
- The rent and any other charges (e.g. the bills for which you are liable).

**If you are unsure, get it checked by a third party. You can ask:**
- The Housing Rights Centre (New Road).
- The Tenancy Relations Officer, Oxford City Council.
- Shelter.
- The Student Advisor at OUSU (advice@ousu.org).
- The Citizens’ Advice Bureau (St. Aldates).

Contact details are in the ‘useful information’ section.

**Addendums to the contract**

If you and your landlord/agency agree to make small changes to the form, this can usually be done by crossing out the old text and writing in the new, and having it initialled or signed by the tenant and the landlord. This is preferable, as it entails no extra cost and takes very little time. In rare cases, you may need to rewrite the whole contract. Ask in advance about the costs of this – consult the Citizens’ Advice Bureau if a charge is being levied, as you may not have to pay it.
Step 6: move in

Before you move in

Utilities and the Internet
Check price comparison websites for gas, electricity, landline and internet deals. It is best to do this in advance because it is time-consuming and typically requires the internet (which you probably won’t have when you move in). See the ‘Useful Info’ section for suggestions of websites. Ask the landlord who the current suppliers are and what limits there are on changing. When choosing an internet deal, think about bandwidth limits, taking account of the number of people in the house, and how many of those people love YouTube and the iPlayer.

Insurance
Set up insurance for the house, or at least decide if you want it. In Oxford, the two most common crimes committed against students are bicycle theft and laptop theft. Every year, British students claim million of pounds in insurance claims, suggesting that it’s worth the cost. The NUS (National Union of Students) recommends Endsleigh for students.

Once you have your keys, it is essential to do the contract and inventory tasks before moving all of your possessions in.

Contract
Check that all the terms of the contract have been fulfilled. If any repairs or other changes were promised, have they been completed?

Inventory
Check the inventory for accuracy. This can take more than an hour, but it essential if your landlord or agency is stringent about the conditions under which they’ll return the deposit.

In particular:
- Check every item on this list to see that the house and all the furnishings are as described.
- Check for any part of the house that isn’t clean, or that is damaged in any way. Note these on the inventory and take photos (ideally with date stamps) to accompany them.
- Although you hopefully won’t need them, they are invaluable if you are struggling to get your deposit back.
- Your agency or landlord should stipulate when and how you should send them the amended list.
Legal standards
Check that the house meets basic legal standards (fire safety, sanitation facilities, ventilation, kitchen facilities, etc). See the OUSU website for a detailed breakdown of your entitlements. If there are five or more tenants, check that the house complies with HMO regulations. Check the OUSU website for more details.

Utilities
Set up the payments for utilities, such as gas, water and electricity. This typically involves about 40 minutes of phone calls. To find out your gas supplier, call the ‘M number enquiry line’ (0870 608 1524); to find out who your electricity supplier is, call 0845 444 555 (this is the British Gas enquiries line). Also, set up your internet connection as soon as possible, as it typically takes a week before it’s ready to go.

It is best to learn how to use your heating when you move in. Don’t wait until 7th week when it’s snowing and you realise that you don’t know where your thermostat is.

Council Tax
Exempt yourself from Council Tax. It is important to do this soon (non-payment can lead to a Court Summons, which costs £50). You will each need a letter from your college confirming that you are a studying for a degree. The College Secretary or Academic Administrator is usually the person to ask for this. You can also get it by going to your single sign-on account, changing the address to that of your new house and printing off an enrolment certificate. The College Secretary/Administrator can then stamp the letter/certificate for you. Call the City Council on 01865-252870 to apply for your discount/exemption.

N.B There can be limits to the exemption if one of the housemates isn’t a student.
Step 7: day-to-day living

Communal finances

Rent and bills
Many landlords and agencies will insist on the rent payments being paid as a lump sum every month (e.g. a single cheque or transfer). To do this, you can either rely on one person’s account, or set up a separate account for the house.

The advantages of a separate account are that:

• You can use this account for all bills, not just the rent. This also makes it easier to set up direct debits (which usually save money, compared to cheques or standing orders).
• Only money intended for ‘house costs’ will go in and out of the account, so it won’t be mixed up (accidentally or otherwise) with someone’s own money.
• If the account includes online banking, you can share the password so that any housemate can log in to see it at any time (you must have strict rules around password protection).
• It’s easy to see who has (and hasn’t) paid their share of the rent or bills.
• It is easier to budget, both individually and as a house, if essential spending is ring fenced.
If you do set one up, there are a few things to bear in mind:

- **Name:** One person will have to have the account in their name, and bear liability for it (even if it’s a joint account). Typically, it’s best to select someone who is relatively assertive (for chasing up payments to avoid bouncing cheques) and in a position to bear more financial risk.

- **Changes:** Only the account holder can make and authorise changes to the account and payments from it.

- **Password protection:** Although already said, it really can’t be overstated how important it is to have good protection for the passwords and other details. The greater the number of people who use the account, the greater is the number of opportunities for identity theft. The account will have a lot of money in it for a few days every month. It is advisable to change the password every few months, and to keep all the literature (e.g. statements) in a safe spot. See the OUSU website for more information about keeping personal and financial data safe.

- **Payment methods:** You will need both a chequebook and a debit card. The debit card will be needed for any bills that aren’t set up by direct debit/standing order, one-off bills and, where applicable, council tax. Decide early on who will have access to these, and under what conditions they can be used.
TV licence
If you have a TV or laptop that receives TV programmes as they air, you must have a TV licence (this does not include watching shows that have already aired, such as on the iPlayer or programmes that air live on the internet). You can’t rely on the one that covers your parents’ house, or any other house you live in. If you have a joint tenancy agreement, you should only need one licence for the house. It costs £142.50 for colour and £48.00 for a black and white TV. You can apply for a refund if your licence is still valid for at least 3 whole months and you no longer need it. If you are moving home, you can transfer your licence by changing the registered address. You should be able both to register your TV and manage your payments online. For details, see the ‘Useful Info’ section.

Parking permits
If your house is in a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ), you will need a permit to park your car. They cost up to £40 (or less, if the permit is for less than 12 months). You can find out if you live in a CPZ and apply for a permit by contacting the City Council’s ‘Parking Shop.’ You may also need permits for visitors’ cars. See the ‘Useful Info’ section for details.

Energy Saving
In addition to selecting your supplier with care, there are other small things you can do to reduce your energy costs (and carbon footprint).

- Get a draft excluder for the front and back doors
- Use energy efficient light-bulbs
- Put the heating and hot water on a timer
- If you tend to spend most of your time in one room, buy a halogen heater for that room, and turn off the heating in the rest of the house
- Fill your freezer, even if it’s just with bread. The more full it is, the less heat the freezer will lose every time you open it
- Keep the freezer at -18C, the optimal temperature for a freezer
- Draw the curtains in all rooms at night, including social rooms and empty bedrooms – it will preserve more heat.
- Plan your meals so you use either the hob or the oven, instead of using both
- Do your work in the library, rather than separately heating and lighting your house

Communal shopping
If you decide that you want to buy some things communally but want to minimise friction between housemates, it’s best to:

- Agree on them in advance
- Focus on non-perishables
- Buy them in bulk
- Shop online

Obvious candidates for communal shopping are:
Loo roll, cleaning products (sprays, washing-up liquid, dishcloths), Clingfilm, foil, light bulbs, toothpaste and soap

Food items can be tricky if some housemates eat in or cook less often than others. If this isn’t an issue, then add in oil, butter, milk, salt, pepper, sugar and tea. Wait a week or two to see what people actually use: it can cause tension if some people feel they are subsidising others.
Household quibbles: cleaning rotas and sharing

Along with money, varying levels of commitment to cleaning and the notion of personal property can be a big source of tension. Below you will find a few general tips and some examples of systems you might want to employ if these are difficulties.

• Accept that, however frustrating, everyone has different definitions of ‘clean’; Your definition is just as maddening as everyone else’s.
• Decide what your priorities are. Then, as a group, decide what housework needs to be done, and to what standard. If your own standards are a lot higher, then you might have to accept that it’s not fair to expect everyone else to meet them; you might have to do a little more housework than the others to have things your way. If your standards are a lot lower than the group’s, ask if you can have tasks that matter to you and you want done. If you don’t care about seeing any housework completed, opt for those that cause the least upset if they’re done late, infrequently or less well (e.g. the vacuum cleaning is safer than dishes). You should certainly do your share, but it’s good to minimise the impact of your natural tendencies.
• If you don’t want people to use your things, don’t leave them in the communal space. This applies to laptops, shampoo, and most things in between. In some houses, it can apply to toothbrushes. You have been warned.
• If you don’t want things in your room to be used, you need to make this clear from the outset. Speak directly to the ‘offender’ and make clear why this is a problem for you. Bitching about it to the rest of the house doesn’t ensure they find out you’re upset.
• Don’t pick the room with the double bed if your stomach turns at the thought of others using it. They might do this.
• If one of your housemates is uptight about housework or your social habits (e.g. they get angry at you for coming home late or making noise after midnight), the only solution is to talk to them. You can’t find a solution until you understand their point of view.
• If you feel like screaming or are on the verge of a row you’ll regret, but don’t want to vent to your other housemates or friends, you can speak to a peer supporter or Nightline and say whatever you want. Despite perceptions of ‘welfare people,’ they’re still students with a sense of humour (and are probably going through the same thing).
• If things are really going badly, and you want to leave the house (or want someone else to leave), speak to your letting agent or landlord to investigate the legal side of things. If you don’t trust them to keep confidence, you can ask OUSU’s Student Advice Service to ask on your behalf. See ‘Useful Info’ for contact details.
Possible systems for housework

N.B Don’t introduce a system unless everyone’s on board with it; it’s pretty passive-aggressive to stick a list of chores on the fridge unannounced. Also, try to introduce a system at the start — it’s harder to do later in the year.

• Divide up the house into rooms or tasks for which different people have responsibility. These can be permanent or rotated.
• Decide what jobs there are and, provided everyone’s happy and able to do them, have a cyclical rota. Keep it simple; it’s easier to do ‘bathroom’ in one go than ‘sink’ one week and ‘toilet’ another, and makes the list less complicated (and less daunting). In some houses, people are expected to tick things off once they’ve done them. This works for some, but could be the death knell in other households.
• Have a cleaning day/time every week when everyone has to do something. Enforcing this is no mean feat and is best reserved for smaller households.
• Divide tasks so that some people have ‘little and often’ jobs (e.g. cleaning the shower) and others have larger, infrequent jobs (e.g. cleaning the oven or fridge).

Basic maintenance

This section goes through some very basic ‘repairs’ and maintenance that you can easily do by yourself. Where you’re not sure what the problem is, or recognise that your efforts will probably worsen it, call your landlord or letting agent for advice and to arrange repairs.

Problem: Only the lower parts of the radiators heat up
They probably need to be bled, which means you need to remove air from the radiator. It is more likely to be needed in rooms higher up in the house. Look for a little ‘nib’ at the top/upper side of the radiator. You’ll need a radiator bleed valve key that fits into it (they’re usually square or hexagonal). Make sure the heating is on. Twist the key slowly until you hear a hissing or whooshing sound. Once water starts to trickle out, close it tightly.

Problem: The sink is blocked
It might be a local blockage. Look underneath the sink for the U-bend (the part of the pipe that is U-shaped). Unscrew it gently (there should be rings where it connects to the rest of the piping. Check to see if these are blocked and clear it out if so. If this isn’t the source of the problem, try putting some barely-diluted caustic soda down the plughole (rinse thoroughly afterwards!). If this fails, you need to call your landlord or letting agent for a plumber.

Problem: The shower is blocked
Hair might be blocking it up (particularly if there are several long-haired housemates). Pour some barely-diluted caustic soda down the drain and use a strainer/drainer/plug guard to prevent build-up in future. If this doesn’t work, call your landlord for a plumber.

Problem: The electricity has gone out
Check the fuse box (this is where you read the meter when you moved in - it’s usually outside or in the front room). Flick on any switches that have gone off. If it happened when you flicked an appliance on or off, unplug it before going to the fuse box. If this is the case, you might need to fix the appliance (e.g. change a lightbulb or change a fuse in a kettle). If one appliance keeps causing blackouts, it’s time for a replacement.
Step 8: rights, responsibilities & getting help

Accommodation standards

There are minimum legal standards that your landlord is obliged to meet. If your landlord refuses to improve the house so as to meet these standards, or you are unsure about whether or not your house meets these standards, you should contact Environmental Health (see ‘Useful Info’ for more details).

The information below is from www.direct.gov.uk.

Housing Standards

A property should be safe and healthy for occupiers, so responsibility should be taken to ensure that:

- The dwelling is capable of providing adequate heating, which ideally means controllable central heating and insulation, with equipment and the fabric of the building in good repair
- Electricity and gas supplies, and the sanitation (drains, basins, sinks, baths and WCs) are in working order
- There are no fall or trip hazards
- Water heating equipment is in working order
- The property is free from damp

Gas Safety

Your landlord must ensure that:

- All gas appliances and installations are maintained in good order
- Gas boilers get an annual safety check, carried out by someone who is registered with Gas Safe Register
- They keep a record of the safety checks, and issue it to you within 28 days of each annual check
Electrical Safety
By law, your landlord must make sure that the electrical system and any electrical appliances supplied with the let, like washing machines and toasters, are safe to use. Your landlord must make sure electrical wiring and appliances are maintained in a safe condition for the length of the tenancy. If your landlord supplies new appliances, he or she should also provide any accompanying instruction booklets.

Fire Safety
The 2004 Housing Act requires the landlord to do several things about fire safety:
- There has to be an adequate means of escape
- Depending on the size of the property, there may have to be smoke alarms and fire extinguishing equipment

If the property is considered to be a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) by the City Council and is subject to licensing, your landlord must also comply with license conditions in relation to fire safety.

By law, your landlord must:
- Make sure that all the gas appliances they provide are maintained in good order and that a Gas Safe registered plumber carries out a safety check each year
- Make sure any furniture and furnishings they provide meet the fire resistance regulations.

Oxford City Council’s Environmental Health Officer will be able to give you more details about your landlord’s obligations and can force your landlord to provide adequate fire precautions.

Landlord’s responsibilities

Regardless of the tenancy you have, your landlord/letting agent has the following responsibilities:
- Not disturbing the tenants unnecessarily
- Following the procedure in the tenancy agreement should they want the tenants to leave
- Carrying out major repairs (e.g. damage to the washing machine that is due to regular wear and tear)
- Meeting legal safety standards (see the OUSU website for more information)
- Ensuring you can contact them, by giving a name and contact address

These responsibilities, and any additional ones, should be detailed in your tenancy agreement.

Your responsibilities

Your responsibilities should also be outlined in the tenancy agreement. Basic ones that always apply, regardless of the tenancy type, include:
- Paying the rent, in full and on time
- Paying the bills, in full and on time
- Keeping the property clean and tidy
- Carrying out basic repairs
- Promptly informing the landlord of any larger repairs that need to be done (e.g. burst pipes, broken heating, rot, etc.)
- Respecting the neighbours (particularly in terms of noise and rubbish in the front garden)
- Not smoking indoors (few contracts allow this)
• Allowing your landlord access when required
• Asking for permission if sub-letting or making any permanent changes to the property (even if they are improvements)
• Ending the tenancy in accordance with the contract
• Leaving the house in the same, or better, condition than you found it.

Repairs

The landlord will be responsible for most repairs, insofar as they will have to organise and pay for them. However, you must look after the property in a responsible way. You must take proper care of it.

*For example, you should:
  • Turn off the water if there is a risk of burst pipes when you are going away
  • Unblock the sink when it is clogged up by waste
  • Not damage the property, and make sure that your family and guests do not do so. If they do, you may be liable.

The landlord can seek re-possession where the tenant or their guest has damaged the property. Apart from your duty to take care of the property, you generally only have to do repairs if the terms of your tenancy agreement say that you must. However, whatever the tenancy agreement says, you can’t be made to do repairs for which the landlord is responsible by law.

*Your tenancy agreement will outline the specific responsibilities of your landlord, but they will usually include repairs to:
  • The structure and exterior of the building (walls, roof, floor, doors, windows)
  • Sinks, baths, showers, toilets, pipes and drains
  • Heating and hot water
  • Mould and damp
  • Gas appliances, chimneys and ventilation
  • Electrical wiring

If there is a problem that you cannot repair yourself, you should let your landlord/letting agent know immediately, as it may be a condition of your tenancy agreement (and you may be held responsible if you allow a problem to worsen). If the landlord fails to respond to your request, you can undertake them yourself (e.g. by hiring a plumber), but you must keep your landlord informed. Try to do it all in writing, such as by emailing them, so you can prove it later (should things become difficult).

Alternatively, you can call an Environmental Health Officer (see the ‘Useful Info’ section) and they can assess whether or not your landlord ought to be organising and paying for repairs.

Harassment

*What constitutes harassment?
With relation to housing, harassment is any action undertaken by the landlord or their agents (e.g. the letting agency, a contractor who has been hired to undertake repairs) which is likely to make you want to leave your accommodation. It can be subtle or blatant and can build up over a long period of time.
Examples of harassment can include (but aren’t limited to):
- Changing the locks without informing you
- Cutting off energy supplies without good cause
- Visiting at unsociable hours
- Persistently visiting the house
- Interfering with or removing your possessions without good cause
- Starting disruptive or unhygienic repair or building work and failing to finish it
- ‘Normal’ harassment (threats, aggression, racial abuse, sexual innuendo)

What to do if you think you are being harassed
Keep details of any incidents, including what happened, where and when. Note down who else was present at the time. If possible, ask them to do the same.

There are many sources of support and help. Even if you are unsure as to whether or not the behaviour constitutes harassment, you should seek support as soon as possible. You can contact the Housing Rights Centre, the Tenancy Relations Officer at the City Council, the CAB or OUSU. You may wish to report incidents to the police or contact Victim Support. See the ‘Useful Info’ section for contact details of these organisations.

If you decide to pursue a case of harassment, you can seek:
- Someone to mediate between you and your landlord
- A police warning for the harasser
- An injunction against the harasser
- Compensation for the harassment

The latter two require that you bring the case to the County Court, for which you may wish to enlist the help of a solicitor.

Eviction

What is illegal eviction?
Illegal eviction takes place if your landlord, or another person, forces you to leave your home without following the procedures outlined in law and in your tenancy agreement. Eviction typically requires a Court Order.

What to do if you think you have been evicted illegally
What your landlord can or can’t do will depend upon your tenancy agreement. Typically, your landlord must give you written notice to leave the property; a verbal notice is usually not sufficient. Seek advice from the Citizens’ Advice Bureau, Housing Rights Centre or Tenancy Relations Officer immediately (see ‘Useful Info’ for contact details).

If you have been locked out, contact the police and a Tenancy Relations Officer, and they will arrange to unlock your home. The Tenancy Relations Officer can advise you about whether or not you need to seek an injunction (and therefore the help of a solicitor).
Help and Advice

If you are facing harassment or eviction, are having problems with your tenancy, are struggling to regain your deposit, or want support with some other problem, there are many organisations that can help you. Below is a brief outline of different organisations and the ways in which they can support you; contact details are in the ‘Useful Info’ section of this guide.

• Tenancy Relations Officer (HMO Team): an Oxford City Council service
• Tenancy Relations Officer (Legal Services): an Oxford City Council service
• Housing Rights Centre: for information and advice
• Citizens’ Advice Bureau: provides free, independent and confidential advice, particularly for legal and financial problems
• Student Advice Service (OUSU): a free service run by OUSU for Oxford Students
• Community Legal Service: for free legal advice online and details about legal aid (free legal advice and representation). Contact the service to find out if you qualify for free or reduced-rate service.
• Trading Standards: for advice if you feel your deposit is being unfairly withheld
Step 9: living out: finances: help with hardship

Living out can be expensive at times, and many students can have lean periods financially. Things are even more difficult if something goes wrong unexpectedly, but there are many finds available to help you. If you are seeking financial help, bear in mind that you may have to demonstrate that you have exhausted all other sources of income and may have to submit recent bank statements.

College

College Hardship Fund
Your College Secretary will be able to tell you to whom an application can be made. These funds are typically made for unforeseen financial hardship. It is best to investigate this option as soon as possible, as deadlines can be strict. However, for real ‘emergencies,’ colleges can be much more flexible and responsive than other sources of financial help.

Living Out Grants and Loans
Some colleges offer loans and grants specifically for the cost of living out. Ask your College Secretary for details.
University

Access to Learning Fund (ALF)
ALF provides extra assistance for students on low incomes, or those in financial hardship, in the form of grants and short-term loans. It is available to UK undergraduates and graduates. Application forms are available from the Student Funding and Access Office (see ‘Useful Info’ for details).

University Hardship Fund (UHF)
UHF provides assistance for students in unforeseen hardship either in the form of a grant or loan depending on the student’s circumstances. It’s available to both international and UK students. The deadlines are 4th Week (Michaelmas and Hilary) and 2nd Week (Trinity). Application forms are available from the Student Funding and Access Office (see ‘Useful Info’ for details).

Beyond the University

Housing Benefit
If you’re on a low income, are disabled or have children, and need financial help to pay all or part of your rent, you may be able to get Housing Benefit. Contact Oxford City Council to find out if you are eligible (see ‘Useful Info’).
Step 10: safety & security

Theft and Break-Ins

Student homes are three times more likely to experience theft than those in a non-student area; they’re less likely to be secure and have many valuable items (e.g. laptops, nice clothes, even car keys). If you want to avoid being a victim of crime, and advice on what to do if you are caught out, read the following tips. There is much more information available on the OUSU website.

- **Lock your doors and windows**, even when in the house. 20% of break-ins don’t involve force: they literally walk in to the home, through an open door or window. It’s easy for a thief to enter and take something while you’re upstairs in the shower or cramming for collections, so you should always lock the door. Even small windows should be locked – not all thieves are adults.

- **Fit mortise locks** to all front and back doors. These make it difficult for a burglar to shove or kick the door in, unlike a standard Yale lock. They also prevent burglars from turning the lock by reaching through the letterbox. Pressure your landlord to install one – it will be a headache for them, too, if the door is kicked in. Mortise locks should be Kite marked BS3621.

- **Look at the home through a burglar’s eyes**. If you can get in when you forget your keys, so can a burglar.
• **Never leave notes on the door.** Advertising ‘gone out’ or ‘back in half an hour’ is a sure-fire way to reduce risk for aspiring burglars.

• **Hide the signs of an empty house.** Don’t pull over the curtains during the day, and turn on a hall or landing light if you’re out in the evening (a timer is useful for this, if you tend to go out straight from the library).

• **Don’t leave your key under the mat, or anywhere else outside the house:** Burglars will check all those spots, and may also have watched the house to see where you go to get your key.

• **Know who is coming in and out of your residence.** According to the NUS, recent research shows that criminals are making efforts to integrate with students (e.g. by dressing in a similar way), to make it easier to wander into houses. If someone’s in the house, or knocks on the door, don’t be afraid to quiz them.

• **Keep your keys out of view.** Many students leave their keys and wallet in the hallway or on tables, making it easy for criminals (or rubbish friends) to take them.

• **Keep it safe by keeping it hidden.** If you have a laptop, a shiny TV or new MP3 player, keep them hidden when you leave the house, especially if you’re on the ground floor. Displaying them guarantees a decent haul for the uncertain criminal.

• **Mark your belongings with your postcode.** This puts burglars off, as it reduces the resale value and makes it easy to trace. If marking the object would damage it or reduce its value, use a UV pen. If it is recovered, the police will be able to read details that a thief couldn’t see. Buy your own in a stationery shop or ask your Welfare Officer if you can use the ones supplied to them by OUSU.

• **Lock up valuables over the holidays.** Student homes are easy to spot, and thieves know you’ll probably go home for the holidays. Also, make sure you empty your mailbox, as a full one gives away that the house is empty.

• **Buy insurance.** It will probably cost less than you think, and minimises the impact of nasty shocks.

• **Join a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.** Visit the Thames Valley Police website for details of your local scheme. Joining one can also reduce the cost of insurance.

• **Join the Student Watch mailing list.** Thames Valley Police have set up a Student Watch scheme, whereby you can receive updates on crime statistics and prevention in your area.

*If you get home and discover there has been a break in:*

• **Don’t go in or shout** as the burglar could still be inside – it’s better that they’re still there when the police arrive.

• **Go to a neighbour’s** to call the police, or use your mobile – if you think the burglar is still inside, let the police know.

• **Don’t touch anything,** as you could destroy valuable evidence.
Fire

Below are some simple steps you can take to reduce the risk of fire in your home. For more information on fire safety in the home, visit the OUSU website.

- **Get alarms and test them weekly.** You should have a smoke alarm on each floor of the house, and a heat alarm in the kitchen (as some smoky food, such as fried lamb or stir fry, may cause a smoke alarm to go off unnecessarily). Test the alarms every week.
- **Take care when cooking and have a fire blanket and fire extinguisher.** More than half of accidental fires in the home are due to careless cooking. Take extra care with hot oil, or any dishes where alcohol will be near flames. Use a fire blanket for any oil-based fires.
- **Plan an escape route.** Plan a route to escape your home if there is a fire and make sure everyone in the house knows the plan.
- **Don’t tackle it.** If there is a fire, get out straight away — call the fire services, and don’t try to deal with it yourself unless it is very small (e.g. a pan-fire).
- **Do a bedtime check.** It is easy to leave the hob on or a candle lit before you go to sleep, so you should check for fire hazards before going to bed. You are unlikely to be woken by the signs of a fire (e.g. crackling, smoke), so prevention is essential.
- **Don’t overload sockets.** Overloaded sockets can overheat — restrict yourself to one plug per socket and turn them off when not in use. Throw out or repair appliances with exposed or faulty wiring, as they pose a serious risk.
- **Put out cigarettes properly, and never smoke in bed.** Cigarettes cause more fires than anything else — make sure you stub them out properly. Never put a recently stubbed-out cigarette in the bin, as it can cause the plastic to smoulder.
- **Take care with candles and lights.** Have proper holders and keep them away from curtains, upholstery and paper.
- **Ask for a home visit from the Fire and Rescue Service.** Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Services offer a free home fire safety visit. They can also help you develop an escape plan for your property. Get in touch to arrange a time that is convenient for you (see ‘Useful Info’ for more details).

Gas and Carbon Monoxide

Gas

If you smell gas or think there is a leak, call the Gas Emergency Services immediately (0800 111 999). Once you’ve reported the problem, it is essential to follow these safety steps:

- Do not turn electrical switches on or off (including TV, lights and computer).
- Open all windows and doors, to increase ventilation.
- Put out all naked flames and cigarettes. Do not strike matches.
- Anything secured by an electric lock should be opened manual (e.g. doors or gates).
- Turn off your gas meter at the main control valve, unless it’s in a confined space with poor ventilation.
How do I turn off the gas meter?
You first need to locate the gas isolation valve. In newer houses, the gas meter and isolation valve are often outside in a meter box. If not, try looking under the stairs, beneath the kitchen sink or in the garage. To turn off the gas supply, simply turn the handle a quarter turn so the lever is at 90 degrees to the upright gas pipe.

Carbon Monoxide
Roughly 30 people die from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning every year, and more will suffer from ill health. CO is produced when gas does not burn properly. You can’t see it, taste it or smell it, but CO can kill without warning in just a matter of hours.

To protect yourself from carbon monoxide poisoning:
- Ask your landlord for an up-to-date Gas Safety Certificate
- Where possible, check the flame on your gas appliances (such as the boiler) – the flame should be a stable blue one
- Check for discolouration around your gas appliances; any black marks or stains indicate there could be a problem
- Ask your landlord for an audible carbon monoxide alarm, or install one yourself.

These tips are courtesy of CORGI Gas.
Step 11: transport

Living out can entail a lot of cost or time, as you’ll have to figure out an efficient and cost-effective way to get around. For more information about night safety, please visit the OUSU website or check the OUSU Survival Guide.

Bicycle

Cost
From £50 for a second-hand bicycle, or £70 for a new one (provided you don’t care about it lasting for more than a year), this is definitely the cheapest option over time. A decent bicycle will cost about £200-400, but should last (if cared for properly), ‘Hidden extras’ include helmet, lights (and batteries), a good lock, hi-visibility gear and servicing (about £50 a year). For more information on bicycle safety, preventing theft, and repairs, visit the OUSU website or check the OUSU Survival Guide.

Pros:
• Often the fastest way to get around, especially if you are reasonably fit
• No hassle with timetables and almost no hassle with parking
• Keeps you fit and is environmentally friendly
• You can lend it to friends

Cons:
• The weather – it’s amazing how you can both sweat and freeze at once
• Can be dangerous if you aren’t kitted out properly, if you don’t know the rules of the road, or if the weather is bad
• Bike theft is common
• You can lend it to friends

Bus

Cost
At approximately £1-2 per journey, this is an expensive option. You can get a mega rider ticket (from Stagecoach) or a ‘key’ (from Oxford Bus Company). If you use the bus often, this can save you a lot of money. Students with disabilities may qualify for a free bus pass. See the ‘Useful Info’ section for more details.
Pros:
- Good service
- Safe
- Warm
- Somewhat environmentally friendly.

Cons:
- Waiting for the bus in the rain
- Cost.

Taxis

Cost
Pre-book and ask around for the cheapest firms — prices do vary. Even after all this, it is not a cheap option unless you’re sharing. Students with disabilities may qualify for free or subsidised taxi journeys. Never get into an unmarked car and don’t use numbers on cards in bars or clubs — they may be fake.

Pros:
- Safe, if you use a reputable firm
- Warm
- Fast

Cons:
- Really, really expensive
- Not safe is you’re on your own and/or not with a reputable company.

Don’t forget: OUSU runs a safety bus, which enables you to get home safely for £1. Call 07714 44 50 50 to be picked up between 9pm and 3am from Monday to Saturday and between 9pm and 1am on Sundays.

Driving

Cost
If you have a car, you are undoubtedly aware of how expensive it is. Additional ‘hidden costs’ specific to Oxford include parking permits (up to £40 per year) and security measures in the (likely) event that you don’t have a garage with your house.

Pros:
- Safe
- Warm
- Independent/convenient.

Cons:
- Driving in Oxford city centre is very frustrating — it is not car friendly, there are many bad cyclists and pedestrians can seem to be in their own world
- There is little-to-no parking space in the city centre
- Expense
- Definitely not environmentally friendly
- Friends who have no shame in asking for a lift.
STUDENTS, NEED THE SAFETY BUS?

The Safety Bus

0771 444 50 50

or visit www.thesu.com
Step 12: green living: waste disposal & reduction

Waste Disposal

*Most houses will have the following facilities for disposal of rubbish:*

- A green wheelie bin (for ‘regular’ rubbish), collected fortnightly
- A blue box (for card, cans and plastic bottles)
- A green box (for paper and glass)
- A green bag (for garden waste)

Some houses also have a bin for food (this is currently being trialled). To purchase your own home compost bin, visit [www.recyclenow.com/compost](http://www.recyclenow.com/compost) or [www.owp.getcomposting.com](http://www.owp.getcomposting.com).

Troubleshooting

*Problem: I don’t know when my bins are meant to be collected.*
To find out when your collection dates are, visit [www.oxford.gov.uk/recycling](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/recycling).

*Problem: I don’t know where the bins are meant to go for collection.*
They should be at the boundary of the property (i.e. by your front garden) by 7am on collection day. They should be returned to their usual spot as soon as possible.
Problem: Things were left behind in my bin.
If you included things that shouldn’t have been in the bin (e.g. card in the green box) or hazardous items (e.g. broken glass in your recycling box), it will not be collected.

Problem: I have big, bulky items that I need to throw out.
You can have up to three bulky household items collected at a time for free. Call 01865 252900 to arrange a collection.

Problem: What will happen if I leave out extra rubbish?
If it is non-recyclable, it will be left behind (persistently doing so can leave you with a fixed penalty notice of £80). If you produce excess recyclable waste, leave it in a secure recyclable container (e.g. a cardboard box) beside your green/blue box. Glass must be in the green box. If you regularly have excess recyclable waste, contact Recycling and Waste Services (see ‘Useful Info’ for contact details).

Problem: Despite my efforts to recycle, there is still excess rubbish.
Households with six or more residents may be entitled to a larger wheelie bin. Call the Recycling and Waste Services to request a visit from a field officer (see ‘Useful Info’ for contact details).

Problem: My rubbish was not collected, even though I did everything correctly.
Contact the Service on 01865 252 900. You can also take it to a ‘bring centre’ (go to www.oxford.gov.uk/recycling to find one nearby).

Reducing Waste
For practical tips for minimising food waste and cost, visit the Love Food, Hate Waste website: www.lovefoodhatewaste.com.

Sign up to freecycle to rid yourself of unwanted goods that aren’t completely useless. It’s amazing how much is taken – and the person accepting it will come to your house to collect it: www.groups.yahoo.com/group/Oxfordfreecycle.

Choose products with little or no packaging, and buy fruit and veg loose (the Covered Market is especially helpful for this).

Cancel the delivery of your local directory and use the online directory instead. Call Freephone 0800 671 444 for the Yellow Pages and email distribution@thompsonlocal.com to cancel the Thompson Local directory.

Compost your garden waste – see the ‘Waste Disposal’ section (above) for information about getting a bin.

Make use of, and donate to, Orinoco. They accept and sell paint, scraps and tools, all at very low prices: www.oxorinoco.org.

Join a Community Action Group. They organise events and initiatives to raise awareness and take action on climate change issues including waste reduction: www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk.
Step 13: move out

Sadly, many students struggle to get back all of their deposit. Most often, it is wholly or partially retained due to the house being in worse condition than when they moved in (ranging from insisting that the house be spotless, to high charges for redecoration to cover scrapes and graffiti). If you followed the guidance in ‘Step 6: Move In,’ you should be in a good position to ensure this doesn’t happen to you. This section will outline steps you will need to take, and also explain a few administrative things.

1. **Look for obvious signs of damage** – small (or big!) holes and pockmarks in the walls, broken drawers or windows, damaged curtain rails, soiled carpets, etc. Call cleaners/handy men/decorators as appropriate – get quotes from at least three. Ask around for suggestions, or ask your landlord/letting agent.

2. **Move your possessions out**, or at least pack them away. Save just enough to stay in the house for 2–3 days while you sort everything out.

3. **Clean everything** thoroughly, beginning with the rooms you use least often. Finish with the bathroom, fridge and hallway. Doing this to a very high standard will almost certainly take more than a day. See ‘Cleaning’ (below) for more details on this.

4. **Check the inventory**. Is anything damaged that isn’t listed there, or on your amended version? Is all the property/equipment still in the house, and undamaged? Is it all where it says in the inventory (there can be charges if things aren’t in the ‘right’ place)?
5. **Replace what you can,** put everything back in the right spot, and do a final vacuum cleaning job and wipe-down of surfaces. Does it look good enough for the next set of tenants (i.e. would you have been happy with it when you moved in?)?

6. **Turn off appliances** (leave the fridge door open once it's turned off).

7. **Cancel all the utilities.** Ask how much more money you owe them, so you don’t get any nasty shocks.

8. **Lock all windows and doors and give the key back to your landlord or letting agent.**

9. **Leave your forwarding address(es)** in the house, and another copy with your landlord or letting agent.

### Cleaning and Repairs

Cleaning an entire house to a very high standard is, unfortunately, time-consuming and requires a good deal of energy (and cleaning products).

**A few things you will almost certainly need to do:**

- Sweep the path, tidy the garden(s), ensure the bins are put away neatly.
- Clean all the windows from the inside.
- Clean all the downstairs windows from the outside (especially the ones at the front of the house).
- Dust shelves and surfaces, and dusting away cobwebs. Do this before the hoovering and mopping!
- Hoover the whole house thoroughly, moving aside furniture and using the nozzle to get at ‘hard to reach spots.’ Mop tiled, wooden and lino floors.
- Wash – or at least take out and beat – the curtains and rugs.
- Shake out cushions from sofas and chairs; wash any covers that are very dirty.
- Replace any light bulbs that need it.
- You may need to (gently) wipe and wash the walls; paint over any scrapes on the walls.
- Wipe all doors, including the little ‘crevices’ that capture dust, and wiping doorknobs.
- Clean the oven (a little gross, very necessary).
- Empty cupboards and wipe them thoroughly; wipe handles on cupboards.
- Defrost the freezer (turn it off, leave it open, put newspaper or towels underneath the catch the melting ice).
- Clean the extractor fan.
- Scrape off any ‘congealed’ food from the tiles by the hob.
- Clean the sinks and toilets thoroughly.
- Scrub the shower and/or bath.
- Repair anything that you can fix yourself.
- Tidy away any utensils or equipment that came with the house.

**You may need to hire someone to:**

- Shampoo the carpets (check with your landlord/letting agent about whether or not this matters to them)
- Fix anything that is broken
- Fill in and paint any holes in the walls

This will typically cost less than the amount that will be taken from your deposit, although this won’t necessarily be the case if you don’t hunt around for a good deal.
useful Info

Publications, Websites & Contact Details

Organisations and services

Tenancy Relations Officer (HMO Team)
Environmental Health Service, Ramsay House, 10 St Ebbes Street, OX1 1PT, 01865-252267

Tenancy Relations Officer (Legal Services)
Legal Services, Oxford City Council, Blue Boar Street, OX1 4EY, 01865-252398

Student Advice Service
OUSU, Thomas Hull House, Bonn Square, OX1 2DH, 01865-288461, advice@ousu.org

Citizens’ Advice Bureau
95 St. Aldates, OX1 1DA, 0844 573 0608

Environmental Health Service
Oxford City Council, Ramsay House, 10 St Ebbes Street, OX1 1PT, 01865-252382

Housing Rights Centre
11 New Road, OX1 1LT, 01865 247853

Shelter
0808 800 4444, www.england.shelter.org.uk/

Community Legal Advice
www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk/, 0845 345 4345

The University Land Agent’s and Accommodation Office
Ewert House, Ewert Place, Banbury Road, OX2 7DD, 01865 (2)80811

Trading Standards
Oxfordshire County Council, County Hall, New Road, OX1 1ND, 0845 051 0845

Energy Watch
0800 887777

OFGEM
0141 331 2678

City Council Recycling and Waste Services
www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decER/Environmentwasteandrecycling.htm

Energy Efficiency Hotline
01865 252 197

Thames Valley Police
St Aldates, OX1 1SZ, 0845 8 505 505

Deposit Guarantee Scheme
244 Barns Road, Oxford, 01865-773000

The Parking Shop
Oxfordshire County Council, Speedwell House, Speedwell Street, OX1 1NE, 0845 634 4466

Student Funding and Access Office
01865 280487, student.funding@admin.ox.ac.uk

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (for free home visits)
Sterling Road, Kidlington, OX5 2DU, 01865 842999

Useful websites
www.oxfordshirewaste.gov.uk
www.direct.gov.uk
www.fire.gov.uk
www.oxford.gov.uk
www.lovefoodhatewaste.com
www.tvlicensing.co.uk
www.oxorinoco.org

Publications
Survival Guide (OUSU)
Oxford’s Guide for Private Tenants (City Council)
Oxford Handbook (OUSU)
Student Parents’ Handbook (OUSU)
Checklist
for house visits

General
☐ Address and agency:
☐ Total rent per week/month:
☐ Starting date for tenancy and length of contract:

Local area
☐ Adequate street lighting
☐ ‘Loud’ area (e.g near a pub)
☐ Nearest grocery store/newsagents

Transport
☐ Bicycle racks
☐ Parking space
☐ Bus stop nearby

Exterior
☐ Path (broken or clear?)
☐ Front garden (its appearance?)

Back garden:
☐ size?
☐ quality?
☐ Adequate storage space for bins
☐ Who cares for the gardens (e.g cutting grass, care of plants)?
☐ Roof and exterior (in good condition?)
Bedrooms

- Number:

For each:

- Lock on door
- Single/double bed:
- Comfort of bed:
- Size of room:
- Décor/light:
- Wardrobe
- Chest of drawers
- Bedside table
- Desk
- Chair
- Number of sockets:
- Noise (what rooms are nearby)
- Fire escape access (e.g. out windows)
- Curtain quality (thickness, hang well)
- Any mould, damp or holes (walls and ceiling)?
- Condensation on any of the windows?
- Carpet condition:
- Wall thickness:

Kitchen

- Washing machine
- Tumble dryer
- Dishwasher
- Oven
- Size and quality of fridge:
- Size and quality of freezer:
- Adequate counter space
- Storage space – does everyone with his or her own cupboard (at least)?
- Single or double sink:
- Hob, gas or electric:
- Any mould, damp or holes (walls and ceiling)?
- Taps working?
- Number of electrical sockets:

**Bathroom**
- Does the toilet flush easily?
- Shower or bath?
- Shower strength (turn it on to check!)
- Do the taps work?
- Cleanliness/modernity:
- Adequate storage space?
- Good ventilation (do the windows open?)
- Radiator
- Is the floor laminated or made of another waterproof substance?
- Any mould, damp or holes (walls and ceiling)?

**Social space**
- Size
- Size of dining table
- Number of seats
- Décor
- Light (both natural and artificial)

**Security and safety**
- Smoke alarm (one on each floor)
- Heat alarm (kitchen)
- Carbon monoxide alarm (kitchen)
- Burglar alarm
Contact us for all your insurance needs.

• Studying Abroad
• Possessions
• Gap Year
• Holiday
• Bike
• Car

call 0800 028 7255  visit www.endsleigh.co.uk/university
University of Oxford Accommodation Office
www.admin.ox.ac.uk/accommodation

Private Accommodation for single people, shared accommodation and couples:

(2)80811
accommodation.office@admin.ox.ac.uk
www.admin.ox.ac.uk/accommodation
- Fire blanket
- Fire extinguisher
- Secure locks on ground floor windows
- Mortise lock for front door
- Security of back door
- Security of back garden
- Is there a light at the front door?
- Is all the furniture fire-resistant?

**Energy efficiency**

- Draughts at front or back doors?
- Double glazing for all windows?
- Cracks in any of the windows?

**Miscellaneous**

- Pets allowed?
- Is there already a phone line?
- Smoking allowed inside the house?
- Are you allowed to put up picture hooks or put Blu-Tack on the walls?
- What’s covered by the house’s insurance?
- Is anywhere ‘out of bounds’ (e.g the shed or attic)?
- Do all the major pieces of furniture and appliances come with the house?
- Which bills (if any) are included in the rent?
- What repairs and decoration are routinely done before there are new tenants? What is planned specifically for this property?
Credits

Content:
Dani Quinn
Charlotte Carnegie
Rose Goddard

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Imogen Richardson

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Stefan Baskerville
Dai Bowe
Charlotte Carnegie
Hannah Cusworth
Sarah Hutchinson
Ben Karlin
Eorann Lean
Jack Matthews
Jonny Medland
Lisa Stokes-King
Stuart Togneri
Kat Wall
Yuan Yang