University of Sussex
Students’ Union

Rate Your Landlord Report 2014
Foreword

Rianna Gargiulo, University of Sussex Students’ Union Welfare Officer (2014-2015)

Students struggle with housing in the private rented sector in a number of ways which have both national and local consequences. Students are subjected to sub-standard housing conditions merely under the pretext that they are students and have therefore come to expect lower quality services than the general renting population. Students in the south-east, and Brighton and Hove in particular, face their own challenges with the cost of rent increasing here in one of the most expensive areas to live in the UK. Securing affordable and high quality housing isn’t easy; coupled with higher tuition fees and the cost-of-living crisis which is affecting those living in Britain, the inherently precarious nature of students’ income and security thus leaves them as a particularly vulnerable group of users renting in the private rented sector.

The report exhibits findings which are somewhat unsurprising, considering the extent to which poor quality housing, communication and customer service has become commonplace for student tenants. Many respondents indicated that their properties were not suitable for their needs, and were not affordable, clean or well-maintained. Alongside inadequate conditions, a particular concern of mine following the findings of this report is the persistence of inequalities, with students without a UK-based guarantor at a greater disadvantage when securing a property; the implications of this may fall largely on non-UK students, students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, and estranged students. Prioritising housing in the private rented sector as a Students’ Union will allow us to ensure the recommendations are fully realised in the very near future; property managers must be properly regulated or licensed to ensure that students and other tenants are afforded protection from poor practice, and students should be equipped with the sufficient knowledge and power to allow them to defend their rights and interests as residents.

As the incoming Welfare Officer, I am committed to lobbying for the recommendations agreed in this report, and to ensuring that standards of living for our student population continues to make progress. Additionally, I hope that the work which I will undertake in partnership with this year’s Full-time Officer team will allow us to increase the student response rate of the Rate Your Landlord survey as a means of increasing its representativeness and thus its saliency. I am keen to begin work in conjunction with students, landlords, letting agents and Brighton and Hove City Council, as well as the numerous local campaigning groups which have emerged as a response to these problems, in implementing the recommendations of this report and rewarding best practice.
Introduction

Rate Your Landlord is an annual online survey conducted by the University of Sussex Students’ Union. First launched in 2009, the survey looks at the experience of students living in private rented property in and around Brighton and Hove, and is used to create a better understanding of the issues that face students who rent privately. This includes identifying problems where they exist, recognising good practice when it occurs and informing recommendations that seek to drive up standards in the sector and improve the experience for students. The data gathered from this survey was analysed by an independent data analyst. The use of an independent data analyst ensures that the findings are both accurate and objective, thus also ensuring that there is no error or bias on the part of the report’s writers.
Contents

Executive Summary 5
Literature Review 6
Methodology 9
Section 1: Before the tenancy 12
  1.1 Why do students choose the private rented market over University accommodation? 12
  1.2 When do students start looking for a property? 13
  1.3 How do students find their properties? 15
  1.4 How many properties do students view before choosing a property? 17
  1.5 What are the reasons for rejecting properties? 18
  1.6 Securing a property: pressure, guarantors and fees 19
  1.7 The deposit 21
Section 2: During the tenancy 23
  2.1 When do students move into properties? 23
  2.2 Where do students live and with whom? 23
  2.3 Who manages student properties? 24
  2.4 How much rent do students pay? 25
  2.5 Property conditions and the provision of equipment 29
    2.5.1 Property conditions 29
    2.5.2 Provision of equipment for maintenance 30
  2.6 Sustainability 33
    2.6.1 Double glazing 33
    2.6.2 White goods 33
    2.6.3 Insulation 34
    2.6.4 Fire safety 34
    2.6.5 Gas safety 35
Section 3: After the tenancy 36
  3.1 What happens when a tenancy ends? 36
  3.2 The return of the deposit 38
Section 4: Overall experience of property managers 42
  4.1 Do property managers provide a good level of customer service? 42
  4.2 Do property managers offer low upfront fees? 42
  4.3 Do property managers provide clear information about costs and the terms of the tenancy agreement? 43
  4.4. Do property managers act in a timely and reasonable way to resolve any problems that are reported 44
  4.5 Were properties comfortable and safe 44
  4.6 The overall experience of students with property managers 44
Conclusion 47
Key findings 48
Recommendations 51
Executive Summary

This report looks into the experience of students living in private rented property based on the results of the Rate Your Landlord survey 2013-14. It details students’ experiences before, during and after a tenancy, and identifies both good practice and a range of problems in the sector. The findings include:

- Students’ ratings of their experience with their property manager were split fairly evenly, with almost a quarter rating their experience as very poor and another quarter rating it as very good. UK students tended to have better experiences than both EU and international (non-EU) students.
- Undergraduate students were most likely to begin looking for properties between January and March, whilst the majority of postgraduates began looking between July and September.
- The vast majority of students reported that they were required to pay a deposit. Of those, the majority were charged towards the higher end, at £500 and over.
- The number of students who reported that they had experienced pressure from their landlord or letting agent in order to secure their accommodation has increased from one third to 38% of students this year. This pressure was more evident amongst undergraduates, women and younger students.
- This year’s findings show that rental prices have increased overall since last year’s report.

Overall, the experience of students in the private rented sector who responded to the survey demonstrated that there is still a need for wide-ranging improvements. As a result, this report makes a number of recommendations on both a local and national level, such as:

- The need to improve the information and advice available to students before, during and after their tenancy.
- Lobbying landlords, letting agents and the University to reduce the financial burden of students living in private rented property.
- Improving the overall treatment of students living in the private rented sector, by improving property standards and introducing procedures that will enhance students’ experience of private property, with regards to property conditions, customer service and community relations.
Literature review

This section aims to situate the findings of the 2013/14 Rate Your Landlord report within the national context. We use student-specific research, namely National Union of Student’s Homes Fit for Study (2013)¹ and non-student specific research into the private rented sector such as Shelter’s Can’t complain: why poor conditions prevail in private rented homes (2014)² and Shelter’s consultation response to the review of property conditions in the private rented sector (2014)³. We cross-compare that to the Government’s Department for Local Government and Communities (DLGC) Review of Property Conditions in the Private Rented Sector (2014)⁴ and plans to help private renters. Consideration is also given to Brighton & Hove City Council’s student housing strategy 2009-2014 (2009)⁵.

Shelter’s report mainly focuses on the conditions of properties in the private rented sector. Shelter found that 18% of the UK population live in the private sector, and that the sector has grown exponentially since 2000 because of the high cost of buying a home and the shortage of social housing. Shelter found that over the last decade, rent prices have risen twice as fast as wages but that conditions are poor. Most tenants have experienced problems with mould, poor insulation and damp. Shelter emphasises that it is mostly the lower end of the market that does not meet the decent housing standard. The health of 1 in 10 renters has been affected by a state of disrepair, and Homes Fit for Study confirms this with 304 respondents claiming conditions have exacerbated physical illness. The main barrier to reporting poor conditions was fear of being served a retaliatory eviction notice.

¹ http://www.nus.org.uk/Global/Homes%20Fit%20For%20Study/Housing%20research%20report_web.pdf
The *Homes Fit for Study* report found that 44% of full-time students nationally rent in the private rented sector without a live-in landlord/lady and that the majority of those students pay £300-£400 in rent a month. The most common reason cited for living in the private rented sector was the wish to live with friends. Nationally, 53% of those living in the private rented sector felt their accommodation provided good value for money, and they were least likely to agree that their accommodation was in good condition or a good place to study (64%, 60%). 21% found their accommodation through a letting agent other than their students’ union’s, but most students found their property through an online listing (37%). The top 3 criteria for students nationally was the cost of rent, followed by location and convenience and lastly the state of repair. The majority of contracts are signed in September overall. 52% feel uncomfortably cold in their current accommodation with 76% reporting that they limit the length of time they have the heating on in order to save money on energy bills.

The DLGC’s report paints a very different picture, stating that the quality of the market has improved significantly over the last few years. The current government is of the opinion that regulation that affects good landlords is unnecessary, and that it stifles investment, taking the view that a very small minority of rogue landlords give the entire sector a bad name and as such, to introduce regulation that affects the whole sector would be detrimental. The government sees the reason behind the existence of bad landlords is the fact that they are simply not aware of statutory requirements such as the decent home standard and good practice. To that end, they aim to professionalise the sector. This seems to contradict Minister Pickles’ announcement in October that they will introduce regulations to force letting agents to join redress schemes, as well as “a new code of practice setting standards for the management of property in the private rented sector, with a view to making it statutory to provide greater confidence for tenants in what they can expect.”

Brighton and Hove City Council produced a student housing strategy for 2009-2014 and is currently consulting on its next housing strategy. For the 2009-2014 strategy, the four main priorities were:

- To effectively support and enhance the quality and management of housing and residential environments within studentified neighbourhoods dominated by Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO), in conjunction with the recognition of the need to continue to support private sector landlords to supply high-quality student accommodation.

- To reduce the over-concentration of HMO in some neighbourhoods by promoting and enabling the appropriate development of purpose-built student accommodation at suitable locations within the city, that will appeal to the locational and residential preferences of students.

- To ensure that new developments of student accommodation are well-managed, and do not impact on existing residential communities in negative ways.
• To monitor the changing geographic patterns of student housing in the city and identify signs of destudentification.

While both Universities were consulted, at the time neither Sussex nor Brighton Students’ Union were invited to sit on the strategic housing partnership, and as such, the concerns outlined in NUS and Shelter research are not thoroughly addressed. While it is acknowledged that the demand outstrips supply, and as a result that there needs to be a focus on development, there seems to be more weight given to input from residents other than students. This shapes the strategic priorities.

Overall, it is important to note that while Brighton & Hove follows a national trend of a pressured market which causes rents to rise and housing stock to fall into disrepair, it remains yet more expensive than the national average.
Methodology

The independent analysis of this data went through various stages prior to being publication ready as outlined below. It is important to note that prior to any analysis being undertaken all of the data was verified and validated to prevent repeated submissions and to ensure only actual student responses were included. Initially there were 871 responses to this year’s survey which showed a marked reduction from the previous year (1,901 responses 2012/13). A total of 31 responses could not be validated and were therefore excluded from the analysis, leaving a total of 840 valid student responses.

Responses were collated and the majority of the analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel. Initial general findings were produced examining all student responses to each question, however further analysis employed more detailed investigation looking at different demographic groups and their patterns of responses to specific questions. Cross comparisons were also conducted between questions to highlight any correlations within the data. Statistical significance, along with correlational assertions were determined using SPSS.

The key rating system, applied to property managers, involved the application of the Bayesian average in order to more fairly score each, taking into account the variable number of responses each letting agency had. Below highlights how and why the Bayesian average was applied.

Students were asked to rate property managers on a 5 point scale and each rating was allocated a point score as detailed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly good</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly poor</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These scores were applied to a series of 6 questions listed below:

- Provides a good level of customer service (i.e. helpful, polite, easy to get hold of etc)
- Has low upfront fees (e.g. admin fees)
- Provides clear information about costs and the terms of the tenancy agreement
- Acts in a timely and reasonable way to resolve any problems that are reported (e.g. repairs, complaints etc)
- Provides a property that is comfortable and safe (e.g. free from mould and damp, well insulated and draught-free, has a smoke alarm fitted, has a current gas safety certificate etc)
- How would you rate your overall experience of your landlord/property manager (whoever manages your property)?

Responses to these questions were filtered according to individual property managers, however there was variability in the number of responses for each property manager. This posed a problem as explained below.

Standard mean scoring found the mean score for each property manager and used this as a method to produce an overall student opinion score. However, due to the variability in the numbers of responses across property managers, this method potentially misrepresents the property managers.

For example if property manager X received only one response from a particularly satisfied student, then they would score 100% positively and subsequently have a high overall score. However, if property manager Y had ten responses, nine of which are positive, the overall score would be lower. The greater the number of responses for each property manager, the more representative the sample is. It would therefore be misrepresentative to state that property manager X scores higher, and therefore is preferred by students over property manager Y, given the difference in their sample sizes.

Therefore a Bayesian average methodology was utilised. This takes into account the number of responses for each property manager to reduce the weight of scores (both positive and negative) given to property manager with lower numbers of responses. Using this method with the example cited above, property manager Y, with its greater number of positive responses, will have an overall higher Bayesian average score than that of the single positive property manager X score. This enables fair representation of student responses and avoids unfairly advantaging or disadvantaging property managers.

The key rating score ranged from 0 to 5 keys, including half keys, resulting in a possible 11 different key rating scores. 0 keys represented student responses expressing a very poor overall opinion of the property manager, whilst 5 keys represented a very good overall opinion of the property manager. The table below details the breakdown of the range in which key scores were allocated. This range took the maximum and minimum Bayesian average score for all property managers across all 6 questions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Keys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.85 to 1.06</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.64 to 0.85</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.43 to 0.64</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.22 to 0.43</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.00 to 0.22</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.21 to 0.00</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.42 to -0.21</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.63 to -0.42</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.84 to -0.63</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1.05 to -0.84</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1.26 to -1.05</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those students who responded as having a property manager manage their property, 51 individual property managers were identified. However over 70% of the responses referred to only 14 property managers, and only these 14 most frequently used property managers were scored according to this key rating system.
Section 1: Before the tenancy

This section considers students’ experiences when seeking and securing property in the private rented sector. This includes when and how students seek a property, the factors that influence their decision about whether to accept or reject a property, the costs and difficulties involved and their experiences and opinions of finding and securing property in a competitive and expensive market.

1.1 Why do students choose the private rented market over University accommodation?

When asked whether they would have preferred to live in university-managed halls rather than moving into private rented accommodation the majority responded that they would not (60%), with the remainder either stating that they would have preferred living in halls (30%) or that they were unsure (10%).

For those that said they preferred to live in private rented accommodation the following reasons were given for preferring not to live in university-managed halls:

![Figure 1 - reasons for not living in University managed halls](image-url)
1.2 When do students start looking for a property?

The majority of students (61%) who responded to the survey started looking for their property in the January to March period, however these were predominantly made up of undergraduates. April to June (15%) and July to September (15%) saw a smaller proportion of students looking for accommodation, with fewer still in October to December (9%). The behaviours of undergraduates in comparison to postgraduates were considerably different. Undergraduates, as mentioned preferred to begin looking for accommodation earlier in January to March (67%), whilst the majority of postgraduates preferred to start looking over the summer months, between July to September (49%). Figure 1 below highlights this trend.

When considering the fee status of individuals there was no significant deviation from the trend observed in the undergraduate group, with the majority of students, irrespective of their fee status, looking in January to March (UK = 67%, EU = 48% and international students = 30%).
The only trend worthy of note showed a more even split for International students looking across all time periods. Results are depicted in Figure 3 below.

It is interesting to note that this is quite a unique trend compared to national data\(^6\), where peak times occur in August and September. In comparison students at the Universities of Sussex and Brighton start looking very early on in the year.

![Figure 3 - when do students start looking for property? (fee status)]

\(^6\) Homes fit for Study 2013.
1.3 How do students find their properties?

There were 794 valid responses to this question and following consolidation of the data, responses were categorised into 7 main subheadings: Letting Agent (51.6%), Websites (20.3%), StudentPad (14.6%), Through a friend (9.7%), Facebook (1.8%), University (1.3%) and Poster (0.8%) – see figure 4.

In terms of national data, the National Union of Students found\(^7\) that in a representative sample of 6,696 responses from students in higher education living in the private rented sector, 37% found their accommodation through online property searches, 21% through another kind of letting agent, 18% through word of mouth and 8% through a housing list provided by the institution or students’ union (page 23).

Comparatively, it is clear that students from the Universities of Sussex and Brighton rely more on letting agents to find housing.

The most popular source for finding properties on the internet came from studentpad.co.uk (14.6%), however under the ‘Websites’ subheading, other common websites used were Gumtree (18.4%), Rightmove (0.4%) and Zoopla (0.4%). Behavioural profiles across student fee status’ revealed common patterns matching the overall findings as can be seen in figure 5 below. Worthy of note, and perhaps unsurprisingly given the potential issues faced when sourcing accommodation in a foreign country, is the reliance on facebook and word of mouth for international students.

\(^7\) Homes fit for Study 2013.
Again undergraduates and postgraduates share similar patterns of behaviour, although postgraduates tend to rely less on letting agents (undergraduates 53.3% vs postgraduates 41.5%) and more on the internet (undergraduates 35% vs postgraduates 46.3%) for locating a property. This may be due to a greater likelihood of undergraduates already residing within the vicinity.

Of those respondents who reported that they found their property through a letting agent 65 separate letting agencies were identified within the data. From that exhaustive list 10 letting agents received over 15 unique responses. The top 10 most commonly used letting agents that found accommodation for students are listed in Figure 6 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letting Agent</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MTM</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>15.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4 Lets</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton Accommodation Agency</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pavillion Properties</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelets</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Hilton</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Leasing</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendrick Property Services</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sussex Student Lettings</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harringtons</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>288</td>
<td>58.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most students reported finding suitable accommodation within 1-3 months (78%) and 3-6 months (21%) with only 7 individuals (1%) taking over 6 months to find a property.

There doesn’t seem to be any pattern in terms of when students began looking and when they found accommodation. The 7 student responses that took over 6 months to find a property comprised of 2 who looked between October to December, 4 who looked between January to March and 1 who looked between April to June.

1.4 How many properties do students view before choosing a property?
Student responses indicated a clear preference for viewing 2 or more properties before finally selecting somewhere to move (82.3%), a breakdown of which can be found below. 5% viewed only 1 property and 12.7% not viewing any at all. This showed a general increase from last year’s figures which showed a greater number of students viewing 1 or fewer properties (22%). A quarter of all students viewed over 5 properties.

![Figure 7 - Number of properties viewed by students prior to moving in](image)

There was no real difference between undergraduates and postgraduates, however fee status groups revealed a greater likelihood for UK and EU students viewing 5 or more properties (34.7% and 48% respectively) versus international non-EU students (22.5%). International non-EU students were more likely to view 1 or fewer properties (21.1%), than for UK and EU students (17.6% and 13.3% respectively).
1.5 What are the reasons for rejecting properties?
Given the fact that students were able to select multiple responses because there are often more than one reason for rejecting a property, the figures here will not add up to 100% however the predominant reason for students rejecting a property, as with last year, was poor condition (65.7%). The resulting trends this year align very closely to last year’s findings.

![Figure 8 - Reasons cited for rejecting a property](image)

National data from NUS\(^8\) shows that the majority of respondents to the survey felt rent was too high (48%), and the location inconvenient, as well as poor condition and property that was too small. Nationally, students also reported rejecting properties because they were unable to provide a guarantor or unable to pay for large amount of rent in advance (page 26).

According to our survey, international students were more likely to cite expensive rent (13.6%) as a reason for rejection compared with UK (10.5%) and EU students (10.3%). Both UK and EU students were more inclined to claim poor property condition as a reason for rejection (20.6% and 20.2% respectively) compared with international students (18.6%) and unsuitable size/furnishings was given as a response by UK students (16.7%) more than both EU students (14.7%) and international students (12.4%). However there is little discrepancy between other responses and those within the different fee status groups.

Looking at level of study, postgraduate students were less inclined to accept a property if advanced fee payments were too high (5.6%) compared with undergraduates (2.9%). Unsuitable size/furnishings (undergraduate = 16.3% vs postgraduate = 13.9%), poor location (undergraduate = 15% vs postgraduate 12.2%) and poor customer service (undergraduate =

---

\(^8\) Homes Fit For Study, 2013
4.2% vs postgraduate = 1.7%) showed further discrepancies between undergraduate and postgraduate reasons for rejection.

Finally both poor condition and unsuitable size/furnishings were marginally more likely to be given as reasons by women (21.2% and 17%) compared with men (19.5% and 14.6%).

1.6 Securing a property: pressure, guarantors and fees
Overall 38% of students reported that they experienced pressure from their landlord or letting agent in order to secure their accommodation, however this was not the case for the majority of students (56%). This pressure was more evident amongst undergraduates (40.8%) over postgraduates (25%) and between UK and EU students (40.4% and 41.1%) over international students (26.7%).

Figure 9 - Did students experience pressure to accept a property?

The gender demographic breakdown revealed that women experienced greater pressure from landlords/letting agents (44.3%) than both men (28.2%) and those who describe their gender identity in another way (37.5%). A further age breakdown revealed a greater vulnerability to pressure amongst 18-20 year olds (45.4%), compared with 21-24 years olds (35.9%), 25-29 year olds (32.6%), 30-39% (17.7%) and 40+ (0.0%).
Overall, the majority of students (82%) were asked to provide a UK-based guarantor. There was, however, some variation in the proportions of these when looking at both fee status and level of study. Almost all home (UK) students (90.8%) were asked to provide a guarantor, compared with 68% of EU students and fewer still international (non-EU) students (48.1%).

A similar pattern was found when looking at the student’s level of study. Undergraduates were more likely to be asked to provide a guarantor (88.5%) compared with postgraduates (48.2%).

84% of students reported that they were not charged any further fees and 9% weren’t sure. The remaining 7% were charged additional sums for a variety of reasons (listed below).
1.7 The deposit

95% of all students reported that they were required to pay a deposit. This accounted for the greatest fee faced by students when securing a property. The amount charged varied, as detailed below, however the majority of students reported that they were charged towards the higher end of the scale set at £500 and over (39%), followed by £400-£499 (24%). Only 6% of students reported that they were required to pay less than £100.

When examining gender demographics there appeared to be little difference in the proportions across the deposit amounts charged, however looking closer at levels of study revealed that postgraduates were less likely to be charged a deposit (12.1%) compared with undergraduates (4%).

The majority of students reported that they were aware of the existence of tenancy deposit protection schemes (61%). These are based on legislation that makes it a legal responsibility for landlords and property managers to secure a tenant’s deposit within a protected scheme where the tenancy is an assured shorthold tenancy that started after 6th April 2007. 32% of students reported that they were unaware of the existence of such a scheme and 7% of students were unsure. Further analysis revealed little difference across fee status, level of study and gender.

A similar proportion of respondents (59%) reported that they had had their deposit registered in a scheme. Further analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between those that were unaware of the scheme and had their deposit protected vs those that were unaware and
didn’t have their deposit protected, suggesting that a lack of awareness did not contribute to a greater likelihood of their deposit not being protected.

When looking at the landlord/letting agent division for student deposit registration, students responses revealed that the numbers were almost identical (37 landlords and 31 letting agents). However, given that letting agents were far more prevalent in taking on the property management role, proportionately 11% of landlords did not register the students deposit compared with 7.5% of letting agents according to student responses. When considering those student responses that were unsure, results between landlords and letting agents were comparable (25 and 28.9% respectively) suggesting a potential breakdown in communicating information regarding the tenancy deposit protection scheme to students.

Where applicable, 60% of students reported that they received a receipt for the payment of their deposit compared with 22% claiming they hadn’t and 18% being unsure. A record or receipt and registration details of the deposit protection scheme the deposit is registered with is a legal requirement that all landlords and letting agents issuing an AST must provide to tenants.

Only 13% of students reported that they were required to pay an administration fee for the registration of their deposit within a scheme compared with 56% who weren’t. The remaining 31% were unsure.
Section 2: During the tenancy

This section considers the experience of students during a tenancy and explores where students live, the relation students have with whoever manages the property (i.e. landlord or letting agency), the amount of rent charged and the condition of the property.

2.1 When do students move into properties?
As expected given the dates in which pre-existing students moved out of accommodation and the start dates of courses, most students reported moving into their accommodation in July to September (87%). Only 7% of students reported moving in before this period and even fewer (6%) moved in after this period.

2.2 Where do students live and with whom?
The following bar graph shows the distribution of student accommodation across the different areas of Brighton and Hove and surrounding areas.

![Figure 13 - Where do students live?](image)

Based on the survey results, the five predominant areas for student accommodation lie in Hanover & Elm Grove (24.6%), Mouscoombe & Bevendean (23.1%), East Brighton (16.8%), Hollingdean & Stanmer (9.6%) and Preston Park (6.3%). This is perhaps unsurprising given their proximity to the various campuses.
Overall, the vast majority of students who responded live with other people (85%) and this bears true across undergraduates and postgraduates, as well as across the different fee status groups. However some interesting findings show that a greater proportion of international students live alone (17.4%) compared with home (UK) students (1.5%) and EU students (6%). This is also true for postgraduates (16%) compared with undergraduates (2.1%). Postgraduate students also had a greater propensity for living with a partner (10.1%) compared with undergraduates (1.5%). This is also true for EU students (7.5%) compared with international (1.5%) and home (UK) students (1.8%).

The majority of student who responded live with between 3 to 5 other people (71%), with a household size of 4 people being most common (32.1%). This finding bears true across the demographic breakdowns including fee status, level of study and gender. However when examining the results in more detail, there exists some variation. Home (UK) students had a greater proportion of students living with 5 or more people (27.6%) compared with EU students (8.1%) and international students (12%). This finding was also reflected in undergraduates (26.3%) compared with postgraduates (6.1%). Likewise, international students were more likely to live alone or with one other person (26.7%) compared with home (UK) students (6.4%) and EU students (17.6%). A similar pattern can be seen for postgraduates (35.4%) compared with undergraduates (6.4%).

2.3 Who manages student properties?
The management role for properties occupied by students who responded to the survey lies mainly with Letting Agents (54%), despite 51.6% of students actually finding their property through Letting Agents. Landlord management accounted for 43%, with the respective universities accounting for only 2%. The remaining 1% of students were unsure.

![Figure 14 - Who manages the property?](image)
2.4 How much rent do students pay?
Comparable to last year’s survey results, 25% of students paid a rental amount between £90 to £94.99 per person per week (pppw) however there has been a general shift, with greater proportions of students paying more rent this year than last. The 2012/13 report showed only 20% of students paying rent greater than £100 pppw. This has now increased to 29%.

Figure 15 - How much rent do students pay?

When examining the rental amounts against the property managers, this year’s findings fall in line with those of last year demonstrating a greater rental amount charged by letting agents over landlords. Letting agent managed properties with a rental amount of >£100 made up 17.7% of student responses, compared with landlord managed properties with a rental amount of >£100 making up 10%. The average weekly rent charged for properties managed by letting agents was approximately £97.89, compared with £94.39 for properties managed by landlords.

When examining the student fee status and their respective rental amounts there is a marginal difference in the proportion of home (UK) students who reported paying over £100 pppw (25.7%) compared with EU students (30.7%). However, international students reported paying considerably greater rents with 52% paying over £100 pppw. Closer examination reveals that
these figures are skewed due to the high proportion of international students paying over £130 pppw (19.5%), compared with home (UK) students (1.2%) and EU students (1.3%). These results highlight how international (non-EU) students are paying the top end of all rental amounts charged to students.

The mean rental amount charged to undergraduates was approximately £95.72 pppw, whereas postgraduate students reported paying slightly more at approximately £102.25 pppw. This average rental amount was skewed by a greater proportion of postgraduates paying over £130 pppw (12.1%) compared with undergraduates (2%).

Nationally students pay an average of £91.50 per week. This means that Brighton & Hove and its surrounding areas are more expensive than the national average, which is unsurprising given its location in the South-East of England, and its proximity to London.

Further comparisons were made looking at how students found their property and their subsequent level of rent. The most common rental amounts across the different search methods fell, as expected between £90 to £99.99 pppw. For those that found their property through a friend, the proportion of students who reported paying over £100 pppw was greatest at 36%, compared with those that found their property through Facebook (7.7%).

Figure 16 - How do students find housing?

---

9 Homes Fit for Study, NUS, 2013
Geography also plays a role in the rental amounts charged. The following chart rates the approximate average weekly rental amount per person for different areas.

![Graph showing rental amounts per person for different areas.](image)

**Figure 17 - How much do students pay across different wards?**

When respondents were asked about the number of bedrooms in their properties, the most common number reported within a household was 4 bedrooms (31.4%).

![Pie chart showing number of bedrooms in respondents' properties.](image)

**Figure 18 - How many bedrooms?**
For those students within a 1 bedroom property or studio flats (6.7%) there was a corresponding difference across fee status and level of study as detailed below.

Figure 19 - Which students live in a 1 bedroom property or studio flat?
2.5 Property conditions and the provision of equipment

2.5.1 Property conditions
Overall the majority of students reported that they felt their property condition was to their expectations upon moving in (58%), however 40% stated that it wasn’t in the condition that they expected with 2% being unsure. This pattern of results was consistent across fee status, level of study and gender. Upon further examination of property managers, of those students whose properties were managed by landlords, 62% reported that they felt as those the property condition met their expectations whilst 29.1% felt that it did not. Conversely, for those students whose properties were managed by letting agents, there seemed to be more of an even divide, with the majority of students reporting that they felt as though the condition was not to their expectations (50.4%).

![Figure 20 - student satisfaction of property condition across landlord and letting agent managed properties](image)

Generally speaking students rated their property’s overall condition positively, as detailed below.

![Figure 21 - how do students rate the property’s conditions?](image)
When examining the breakdown of the reported condition against who manages the property, results varied slightly. For those students with a landlord-managed property, the majority felt that the property condition was good (65.3%) rather than poor (20.1%), and 14.6% felt that it was average. For those students with a letting agent-managed property there were nearly twice as many students considering the property condition as poor (37.1%) rather than good (34.6%), and 28.3% felt as though the condition was average.

![Figure 22 - property condition across different property managers](image)

Most students reported that they moved into their property already furnished (69.2%), with fewer being partly furnished (20.1%) and fewer still (10.6%) being unfurnished. The only analysis of note revealed that postgraduates were more likely to live in an unfurnished property (30.1%) compared with (8.2%) of undergraduates. There was also a marginally increased proportion of men living within an unfurnished property (12.9%) compared with women (9.2%).

### 2.5.2 Provision of equipment for maintenance

This question was split into two sections, equipment for maintaining the interior of the property and equipment for maintaining the exterior of the property.

#### Interior

10.5% of students responded to this questions despite having moved into an unfurnished property, where the supply of such equipment would not be expected, therefore their responses have been excluded so as not to skew the general findings.
The chart below shows the remaining breakdown of responses.

![Pie Chart](image1)

**Figure 23** - Have students received equipment for maintaining the interior of the property?

When comparing across property management status, there appears to be a slight variance in responses as detailed below. Based on survey responses, landlords appeared to supply a greater level of maintenance equipment to their student tenants than letting agents.

![Bar Chart](image2)

**Figure 24** - Equipment for interior broken down by landlords/letting agents
Exterior
7.9% of responses came from students within unfurnished properties and so, for the reasons detailed above, have been excluded from this analysis. The chart below shows the remaining breakdown of responses.

Figure 25 - Have students received equipment for maintaining the exterior of the property?

A similar result was found to interior equipment when looking at the property management status.

Figure 26 - Equipment for exterior broken down by landlords/letting agents
2.6 Sustainability
This section of the survey was designed to assess how environmentally friendly the properties of students who responded to our survey were.

2.6.1 Double glazing
59.8% of students reported to having at least some double glazing within their property of which 39.8% had it throughout. This is a reduction of 6.6% from last year and actually falls closer to the results from the survey in 2011/12. 31.6% reported no double glazing at all within their property. The table below shows the difference between those students within landlord-managed properties and those within letting agent-managed properties. As you can see, there is a slightly greater proportion of double glazing reported within properties managed by landlords (63%) compared with those managed by letting agents (57.3%).

![Figure 27 - do properties have double glazing?](image)

2.6.2 White goods
A similar pattern of results are reflected in those properties with energy efficiency rated white goods (i.e. fridge, freezer, washing machine), with a greater proportion of properties that are managed by landlords having at least some white goods with energy ratings (34.6%) compared with properties managed by letting agents (24%), however the majority of students for this question remained unsure (50.5%).
2.6.3 Insulation
Comparable results were found for student’s responses in relation to their property’s level of insulation and draught proofing with a greater proportion of landlord-managed properties being reported as being better insulated (43%) compared with letting agency-managed properties (27.8%). However overall, students did not feel as though their property was particularly well-insulated (56.1%).

![Figure 28 - are properties well-insulated?](image)

The majority of students reported that at least some of their doors or windows did not open or close properly (55.6%) and this was more prevalent in properties managed by letting agents (64.6%) compared with properties managed by landlords (44.8%). In terms of security, students reported that the majority of windows and doors had locks (78.7%) and again this was more common amongst properties managed by landlords (83%) compared with properties managed by letting agents (75%).

2.6.4 Fire safety
Property managers are required by law to comply with fire safety regulations which means, at a minimum, they must provide a working fire detection system, however the level of protection is usually dictated by the size of the property. For typical student properties the provision of smoke detectors is standard practice. It was, therefore, pleasing to see that the majority of properties were reportedly fitted with smoke alarms (87.9%). There was only a slight variance between landlord-managed properties (89.2%) and letting agent-managed properties (87.2%), however there were still 6.9% of properties managed by landlords and 10.3% of properties managed by letting agents that were reported as not being supplied with smoke alarms.
2.6.5 Gas safety

Again, for those properties with a gas supply, property managers are required by law to have an annual gas safety check on the property. All tenants should be kept informed of the gas safety check and should have a copy of the gas safety check record. Results highlighted that the majority of property managers, in which properties had a gas supply, had not shown students a copy of the gas safety record (43%). 41% were reported as being compliant and had shown this record to their tenants and 16% of students were unsure. Landlords performed better in this regard compared with letting agents as shown below. The majority of students reported that they were not shown how to use their property’s heating system (54.8%).

![Figure 29 - have students seen their gas safety check record?](image-url)
Section 3: After the tenancy

This sections considers students’ experiences after a tenancy has ended and looks at both those who chose to remain in the same property for a further period and those who left when the tenancy came to an end.

3.1 What happens when a tenancy ends?
78.9% of student responses related to their current tenancy, however the remaining referred to a tenancy that had previously ended. This section discusses those responses for students following the end of their tenancy.

The majority of students for which their tenancy had ended remained in the same property having renewed their tenancy agreement (61.2%). 24.2% had moved out of their property which shows a significant shift from last year in which 64% of students moved out of their accommodation at the end of their tenancy. 7.6% reported that they had remained in the same property without renewing their tenancy and 7% remained unsure.

![Figure 30 - tenancy status for those students whose tenancy had ended](image)

Those that reported that they had signed a new tenancy agreement were predominantly year 3 undergraduates (58.9%) followed by year 2 undergraduates (23.3%). This is perhaps unsurprising given that these two groups made up 77.9% of all responses however these results are contrary to last year’s findings in which these two groups had a greater prevalence of moving out of their current property.
When looking at the proportions of responses across the year groups, both taught postgraduates and year 4 undergraduates had the highest proportion of students leaving their tenancy (33.3%), followed by year 3 undergraduates (26.3%), year 2 undergraduates (24.2%) and postgraduate research students (22.2%). No year 1 undergraduates reported that they had left their accommodation.

The fee status breakdown reflects the general findings, showing that the majority of students across the different fee status groups remained in their current property having signed a new tenancy agreement. Following the end of the initial tenancy, international students proportionately were most likely to leave their property (30%) followed by home (UK) students (24.6%) and EU students (16.7%). Fewer than 10% of each fee status group reported that they had remained in their current property without signing a new tenancy agreement.

When asked whether there was a fee for remaining in their property, very few students actually responded to this question (12.9%). However for those that did and remained in their property, the majority were not charged any additional fees to stay in their tenancy (56.1%). For the 39.3% who reported that they were charged fees, these fees tended to be charged to those that signed a new tenancy agreement (37.4%) with only 1.9% of students being charged fees for remaining in a property without a tenancy renewal. The average fee charged per person for this renewal was £66.70.

Most students that remained in their property did not report a rental increase (56% vs 44%). There was very little difference across the property management status with regards to the incidence of rental increases.

![Figure 31 - did rent increase for students who remained in a property?](image)

For those that reported rental increases, 95.7% were students who had renewed their tenancy. The average reported weekly rental increase per person was £4.72 (£20.44 per month).
3.2 The return of the deposit

The return of deposits is often one of the most pressing concerns facing tenants. Where it was applicable (i.e. for those students who ended their tenancy and moved out of their property), the majority of students did report having had at least some of their deposit returned to them following the end of their tenancy agreement (71.4%).

![Pie chart showing the proportion of students who received their deposit in full, partially, or not at all.](image)

*Figure 32 - was students’ deposit returned to them after the tenancy?*

The proportion of those who reported that they had their full deposit returned to them (28%) was considerably less than the year before (41%).

When examining the property management status, students living in landlord-managed properties were least likely to see the return of their deposit (40%) compared with students living in properties managed by letting agents (21.1%). However letting agent-managed properties had a greater proportion of partial deposit returns (52.6%) compared with landlord-managed properties (26.7%).

![Bar chart showing deposit return breakdown across different property managers.](image)

*Figure 33 - deposit return breakdown across different property managers*
Fee status analysis revealed that EU students were most vulnerable to having their deposit retained by their property manager (75%), and non-EU students were most likely to receive their full deposit back (60%), as detailed in the table below.

![Figure 34](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes - in full</th>
<th>Yes - partially</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK students</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>56.00%</td>
<td>24.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU students</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International (non-EU)</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 34 - which group of students are most likely to receive their deposit back?

There was a noticeable difference between level of study and the retention of the full deposit by property managers, however undergraduate students were more likely to have their deposit partially withheld (50%) compared with postgraduate students (16.7%). Postgraduate students were most likely to have their full deposit returned to them (50%) compared with undergraduate students (21.4%).

![Figure 35](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes - in full</th>
<th>Yes - partially</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 35 - are undergraduates or postgraduates more likely to receive their deposit back?
Of those students who had at least some of their deposit withheld, 54.4% reported that their deposit had been registered with a deposit protection scheme, 13% that their deposit had not. The remaining 32.6% were unsure.

For those students who had part or all of their deposit withheld, the majority reported that they had received an explanation (75%) however 80% felt that this explanation was unreasonable. Only 28% of students reported receiving evidence of the deductions from their deposit. 68% of students facing deductions reported that they had received no explanation.

Interestingly, 28% of students who reported that they had some or all of the deposit withheld and didn’t receive an explanation, also indicated that they had their deposit registered with a deposit protection scheme. This highlights a potential breach of deposit protection scheme rules.

For those students who disputed their deposit, the following chart shows whether a dispute resolution service was employed and whether this was found to be useful or not. The majority of students who reported disputed deposits did not engage with any dispute resolution service (59.1%).

![Figure 36 - was a dispute resolution service engaged and was it helpful?](image)

For those students who had moved out of their property following the end of their tenancy and who had some or all of their deposit returned to them, the majority did not consider the return of their deposit to be prompt (i.e. within 2 weeks of requesting it) (58.6%).
Those that felt the deposit was not returned promptly were predominantly made up of those who had some deductions. The graph below shows the breakdown of whether students in receipt of their deposit considered the return prompt or not.

Figure 37 - promptness of deposit return against amount returned
Section 4: Overall experience of property managers

This section looks at the overall experience of students in relation to the landlord or letting agent who managed their property and their opinions on the suitability of their property.

4.1 Do property managers provide a good level of customer service?
Generally the majority of students who responded reported that they had a positive experience with their property manager (48.6%) compared against negative comments (39.9%). 11.5% claimed to have a neutral experience. When examining patterns within both the level of study and student fee status, results showed some variation however. International (non-EU) students tended to have more positive responses (57.1%) compared with home (UK) students (47.9%) and EU students (44%). This was also reflected in a reduced number of negative responses (28.6%, 40.6% and 46.7% respectively). Postgraduate responses tended also to be more positive (56.6%) as compared to undergraduates (47.4%).

![Figure 38 - whether respondents agreed that their property manager provides a good level of customer service (filtered by fee status and level of study)](image)

4.2 Do property managers offer low upfront fees?
Most students responded negatively to this question (48.7%) with 32.7% responding positively and 15.5% responding neutrally. EU students tended to give more positive responses (36%) followed by Home (UK) students (32.8%) and international (non-UK) students (28.6%). However over half (50.7%) of UK students responded negatively to this question, followed by EU students (42.7%) and international (non-EU) students (40.3%).
Postgraduates were also more positive when it came to expectations of fee costs with the majority (41%) agreeing that upfront fees were low (32.5% disagreed). Undergraduate responses, however, portrayed a different pattern with the majority (50.9%) disagreeing that upfront fees were low (31.6% disagreed).

![Figure 39](image)

**Figure 39** - whether respondents agreed that their property manager provides low upfront fees (filtered by fee status and level of study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK students</strong></td>
<td>20.21%</td>
<td>12.54%</td>
<td>13.94%</td>
<td>25.26%</td>
<td>25.44%</td>
<td>2.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EU students</strong></td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>17.33%</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International</strong></td>
<td>10.39%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>25.97%</td>
<td>20.78%</td>
<td>19.48%</td>
<td>5.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate</strong></td>
<td>19.13%</td>
<td>12.44%</td>
<td>14.93%</td>
<td>25.66%</td>
<td>25.19%</td>
<td>2.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postgraduate</strong></td>
<td>15.66%</td>
<td>25.30%</td>
<td>20.48%</td>
<td>19.28%</td>
<td>13.25%</td>
<td>6.02%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Do property managers provide clear information about costs and the terms of the tenancy agreement?

Most students agreed that their property managers supplied clear information about costs and the terms of their tenancy agreements (58.7%) with only 25.1% disagreeing. The remaining 16.2% were neutral.

International (non-UK) students tended to agree more to this question (66.2%) compared with home (UK) students (58.3%) and EU students (53.3%). Both home (UK) students and EU students responses were similar in their levels of disagreement (26% and 25.3% respectively), whilst international (non-EU) students disagreed proportionately the least (18.2%).

There was no great difference between the number of undergraduate responses and postgraduate responses, however undergraduates did express a slightly greater proportion of strong disagreement (10.2%) compared with postgraduates (7.2%).
4.4. Do property managers act in a timely and reasonable way to resolve any problems that are reported (e.g. repairs, complaints etc)?
Student responses tended to be fairly evenly split for this question with 43.3% agreeing and 45.3% disagreeing. Further analysis in terms of level of study revealed nothing of note. The only finding worthy of mention is a difference in the proportion of EU students agreeing (36%) compared with international (non-UK) students (42.1%) and home (UK) students (44.3%).

4.5 Were properties comfortable and safe (e.g. free from mould & damp, well insulated & draught-free, had a smoke alarm fitted, had a current gas safety certificate etc)?
Again there seemed to be a fairly even split between student responses that agreed (42.5%) and disagreed (43.6%). Home (UK) students tended to have a greater prevalence of disagreement (45.9%) compared with EU students (44%) and international (non-EU) students (26.32%). Likewise international (non-EU) students tended to agree more (51.2%) compared with home (UK) students (41.9%) and EU students (38.7%).

4.6 The overall experience of students with property managers
Student responses to whether they rated their experience with their property manager favourably or not were split fairly evenly.

Undergraduates were proportionately more likely to express a poor overall experience (43%) compared with postgraduates (30.1%). This is also reflected in the proportionate breakdown of positive responses (undergraduates 40.8% vs postgraduates 50.6%).
A fee status breakdown of responses is presented in the table below.

![Graph showing fee status breakdown](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Rating Score</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Fairly good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Fairly poor</th>
<th>Very poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 keys</td>
<td>24.48%</td>
<td>17.19%</td>
<td>15.97%</td>
<td>16.84%</td>
<td>25.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 keys</td>
<td>22.67%</td>
<td>18.67%</td>
<td>12.00%</td>
<td>24.00%</td>
<td>22.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 keys</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>25.97%</td>
<td>25.97%</td>
<td>11.69%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 keys</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 keys</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 keys</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 40 - satisfaction levels with property managers (filtered by fee status)

The responses of students to the 6 questions asked in this section (4.1 - 4.6) were filtered according to individual property managers and scored as outlined in the methodology earlier in this report. The methodology utilised a Bayesian average to enable fair representation of student responses and avoid unfairly advantaging or disadvantaging property managers based on the number of responses received.

A key rating was applied based on the resulting score. The key rating score ranged from 0 to 5 keys, including half keys, resulting in a possible 11 different key rating scores. 0 keys represented student responses expressing a very poor overall opinion of the property manager, whilst 5 keys represented a very good overall opinion of the property manager.

Of those students who responded as having a property manager manage their property, 51 individual property managers were identified. However over 70% of the responses referred to only 14 property managers (letting agents and/or landlords with multiple properties), and only these 14 most frequently used property managers were scored according to this key rating system, as the remaining property managers didn’t get enough responses to be statistically significant.
Of the 14 property managers who were scored and allocated a key rating only 3 achieved a key rating of 2.5 keys or above out of a possible 5 keys.

**The 3 highest rated property managers were:**

1. Sussex Student Lettings (4.5 keys out of a possible 5)
2. John Hilton (3 keys out of a possible 5)
3. Cambridge Lettings (2.5 keys out of a possible 5)

The remaining 11 property managers achieved key ratings of 2 keys or below out of a possible 5 keys.

Individual feedback sheets are available for each of the 14 most commonly used property managers based on feedback from students who responded to the survey. These detail the key rating achieved, the scores on which the key rating have been calculated, a summary of any qualitative comments made and an overview of the general findings from this year’s survey. Similarly, information sheets detailing the key rating for each of the 14 most commonly used property managers, the scores on which the key ratings have been calculated and a selection of the general findings are available to students.
Conclusion

The findings of this year’s report have, largely, reflected the trends of the reports of previous years. Overall, a fairly even number of cases of both good and bad practice among letting agents and landlords were reported by students who responded to this year’s survey.

42% of students reported positive overall experiences with their property managers. We welcome those reports of good practice which are drawn to our attention each year, and hope that property providers and managers will continue to strive towards improving the experience of students living in the private sector. This percentage, however, does leave a lot of scope for improvement. There are a number of worrying developments since last year’s report. Rental prices are increasing rapidly, and student respondents continue to report similarly disconcerting experiences with regards to property conditions, energy efficiency, safety and general disregard and lack of respect towards student tenants. The growing disparity between standards of customer service, property standards and the provision of services of letting agents and landlords is also worrying; students responding to this year’s survey report that landlords almost always exhibit better practice than letting agents on these issues.

The final section of this report will highlight the key findings and go on to make a number of subsequent recommendations. These focus on combating students’ negative experiences of living in the private rented sector, paying particular attention to poor standards of living and the rising costs of private accommodation in the south-east.
Key findings

- Most respondents (60%) indicated that they would not have preferred to stay in university-managed halls even if they had been given the choice to, the main reasons being cost and location.

- When looking for properties in the private rented sector, the majority of undergraduates (67%) reported that they began looking between January and March whilst the majority of postgraduates (49%) reported that they began looking between July and September. In comparison to national data, students at the universities of Sussex and Brighton who responded to our survey, particularly undergraduates, started looking for properties much earlier.

- Most respondents reported that they found properties through letting agents, with the next most common method being through websites.

- Most respondents reported finding a suitable property within 1-3 months, with the vast majority reporting that they moved into their property between July and September.

- Most respondents felt that their property managers supplied clear information about the costs and terms of their tenancy agreement. International students tended to agree more with this.

- 95% of all students reported that they were required to pay a deposit. The amount charged varied, however the majority of students reported that they were charged towards the higher end, at £500 and over. The majority of students reported that they were aware of the existence of tenancy deposit schemes and making use of them, which is an increase compared to last year.

- The majority of students were requested to provide a UK-based guarantor. Undergraduates were more likely to be asked to provide a guarantor compared with postgraduates.

- International and postgraduate students rely less on letting agents and more on Facebook, the internet and word of mouth to find properties.

- International (non-EU students) were more likely to view only 1 or fewer properties.

- The predominant reasons for students rejecting a property, as with last year, was poor conditions. However, international (non-EU) students are more likely to cite expensive rent than both UK and EU students.
• 38% of students reported that they experienced pressure from their landlord or letting agent in order to secure their accommodation, which is up from a third from last year. This pressure was more evident amongst undergraduates, women and younger students.

• The majority of students’ properties are managed by letting agents (54%), closely followed by landlord management (43%).

• Ratings of students’ experience with their property manager were split evenly, with 24% of students rating their experience very good and 24% as very poor. UK students tended to have better experiences than both EU and international (non-EU) students.

• 25% paid a rental amount between £90 to £94.99 per person per week (pppw) however there has been a general shift with greater proportions of students paying more rent this year than last. The findings showed 29% of students paying rent greater than £100pppw, in comparison to only 20% in the 2012/2013 report.

• Students reported that landlords generally charge lower rent than letting agents.

• International (non-EU) students reported paying considerably greater rents, with 52% paying over £100pppw.

• Overall the majority of students reported that they felt as though their property condition was to their expectations upon moving in, however a worrying 40% stated that it wasn’t in the condition that they expected.

• Students with a landlord-managed property were more likely to rate their property condition as good than those with letting agent-managed properties. 20.1% of students with landlord-managed properties considered the property conditions as poor.

• Students living in properties managed by landlords are more likely to be provided with equipment for maintaining the interior and exterior of the property than students living in properties managed by letting agents.

• There is a slightly greater proportion of double glazing and energy efficient white goods reported within properties managed by landlords compared with those managed by letting agents.

• Overall, students did not feel as though their property was particularly well-insulated.

• The majority of property managers in which properties had a gas supply had not shown students a copy of the gas safety record, and the majority of students reported that they were not shown how to use their property’s heating system.
• EU students were most vulnerable to having their deposit retained by their property manager and international (non-EU) students were most likely to receive their full deposit back. Postgraduate students were more likely to have their deposit returned to them compared with undergraduate students.

• The vast majority of students who had all or part of their deposit withheld felt that the explanation given for this was unreasonable; 68% of students facing deductions reported that they had received no explanation. The majority of students who reported disputed deposits did not engage with any dispute resolution service.

• Most students that remained in their property did not report a rental increase, but for those who did, the average per person was £4.72 (£20.44 per month).

• There is an even split between students who agreed and disagreed that they had been provided with a property that is comfortable and safe. A similarly even split was found between those who did and didn’t feel that their property manager acted in a timely and reasonable way to resolve problems that they had reported.

• Although the majority of students had a positive customer service experience with their property manager, responses were more positive amongst international (non-EU) students and postgraduates.
Recommendations

The findings of this report clearly demonstrate that whilst there are examples of good practice, there is also a need for substantial improvement in many areas in order to drive up standards and improve the experience of students living in the private rented sector. We would like to see a situation where landlords and letting agents provide a consistently high level of service, where students have access to the information they need to make informed choices, are aware of their rights and responsibilities as tenants, and have realistic expectations about what their experience of living in the private sector will be. The following recommendations, together with ongoing work on the recommendations made in previous reports, seek to offer ways that this could be achieved.

Recommendation 1: Improve the information and advice available to students

- The Students’ Union should seek to provide more detailed online advice which can be easily accessed by all students with regards to protecting deposits, and advice specifically targeted at international students to aid them with their search for a property. We should seek to empower all students with knowledge, and foster a ‘know your rights’ culture, including information on what students should expect to pay for their rent, deposit and any other housing-related costs. We should also seek to inform students of the array of alternatives available to them aside from letting agencies when seeking accommodation.
- We will also repeat last year’s ‘#DontRentYet’ campaign in an effort to address undergraduates’ unnecessarily rushing into tenancies too early. This campaign will be promoted during the Autumn term in order to target first year undergraduates, who are most likely to begin searching for properties in the first few months of the academic year.

Recommendation 2: Lobby to reduce the financial burden of students living in private rented property

Living in the private rented sector in south-east England is becoming increasingly expensive. The findings of this report suggest a need to lobby for more low cost student accommodation and to reduce the additional financial burden faced by some.

- We recommend that the University of Sussex adopts of guarantor proposal that we submitted which would allow students who do not have access to a suitable UK-based guarantor an opportunity to apply to have the University of Sussex act as guarantor. This would mitigate against the financial barrier faced by some students who are less able to find housing as a result of their fee status or family income.
- In addition, the University of Sussex should provide affordable on-campus accommodation, below the level of private sector rent, as this has been shown to be the primary reason as to why students choose not to remain in University halls of residence. This recommendation also goes some way towards addressing the aforementioned problem of guarantor provision.
• The Students’ Union will continue to lobby local government, landlords and letting agents to limit rent increases to a reasonable rate. Similarly, we will encourage property managers to offer responsible rates for upfront charges such as admin fees, advance rents and deposits and to withhold from increasing rent above inflation.

**Recommendation 3: Work to improve the overall treatment of students living in the private rented sector, paying particular attention to property conditions, customer service and community relations**

The report’s findings regarding property conditions both at the beginning and throughout a student’s tenancy suggest the need to encourage responsibility among landlords and letting agents. This includes fire and gas safety precautions, deposit protection schemes, equipment for the upkeep of the interior and exterior of the property, double glazing and energy efficient white goods. The Students’ Union is committed to protecting the environment and is involved with numerous projects and initiatives to raise awareness and reduce our impact on the environment in support of more sustainable solutions. It is recognised that being environmentally friendly can also have a positive impact on students by reducing their household utility bills. Increasing rental standards in these areas therefore serve a dual purpose in terms of sustainability and student satisfaction.

• We remain committed to the principle of national regulation of the private rented sector and will continue to lobby Government for a compulsory set of standards that all property providers have to abide by. We will do this by responding to relevant consultations, lobbying local MPs and working with other organisations where relevant on this issue.

• In the meantime we recommend that property managers embrace more vigorous self-regulation and consider signing up to a code of standards at least equal to those adopted by the Universities of Brighton and Sussex for landlords advertising on StudentPad. We advise that landlords and letting agents are transparent and honest with regards to disputes over deposit deductions, as well as the condition of the property before the tenancy begins, and offer excellent customer service to all students before, during and after a tenancy.

• The Students’ Union will also work towards improving the attitudes of local residents, landlords and letting agents towards students by continuing our community outreach and engagement work, which highlights the benefits of a large student population, and further developing our new Community Rep Scheme, which helps to strengthen the student voice in local discussions and decision making, promote the positive community contributions of students and to bridge the gap between students and longer term residents in the city.