

Home Energy Moving in

Guide for students who pay their own bills

Moving to a student house in the private-rented sector can feel like a step into adulthood for many reasons, and it can be both exciting and nerve-wracking. With this guide, we hope to alleviate some of the stresses and help you get to grips with being an efficient and eco-friendly user in your university home.

Energy Supply and Bills

Things to do when you move in:

- Find your existing energy supplier
 - Find your gas supplier - [Find My Supplier](#)
 - Find your electricity supplier - [Who is my DNO](#)
- Take meter readings from all of your meters and make a note of them somewhere for future reference, should you need them
 - If you change energy supplier or start a new bill, they may ask for a current or new meter reading, so make sure you know where your meter boxes are and take your own readings regularly, even if you have a smart meter.

Check to see if you are getting the best deal for your energy

You could save hundreds of pounds a year on your bills by switching supplier or changing tariffs with your current supplier. Use an ofgem accredited price comparison site, as listed on [Ofgem's website](#). These suppliers should all display the Ofgem Confidence Code logo.



Comparison sites often do not show you the whole market, only the tariffs for suppliers they can switch you to directly. To make sure the other (potentially cheaper) results are not being excluded, check the filter settings on the comparison results.

Your energy bill

Energy bills can be confusing, but understanding them can help you to get to grips with your energy usage at home. This [video from Home Energy Scotland](#) provides a helpful visual guide for this.

If you receive an energy bill that has an 'E' marked against the meter reading, then this means it is 'estimated' by your supplier, and you may not be paying the right amount for your energy. Having several estimated readings can sometimes lead to large unexpected bills. Be sure to regularly submit accurate readings to your supplier to ensure you are being billed accurately for the energy that you use and to avoid estimated bills.

If you pay by direct debit, ensure your payments are set high enough throughout the year to spread the cost and still cover your winter heating energy use without issues. Being on a fixed energy tariff can also help with this, especially if you are sharing the bills with multiple housemates – speak to your energy supplier for more information on this.

If you fall behind on your energy bill payments, get advice as soon as possible. Suppliers should agree an affordable repayment plan with you. The 'ability to pay' under this plan refers to what you, the customer, can afford, not what the supplier deems to be affordable. You can also get advice on energy debt from the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on **03454 040506**, or visit your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

Get a smart meter

Smart meters automatically measure how much electricity or gas you're using, and show you what it means in pounds and pence on their handy in-home displays in near-real time. They also send the meter readings to your supplier without any extra work from you.

If you pay your bills directly, you are automatically entitled to get a smart meter – just request one from your supplier. Find out more about smart meters from [Smart Energy GB](#).

Get to know your heating system

Thermostats:

- Find out what your thermostat and/or boiler is, and how to set them, including any timers.

- Familiarise yourself with the user manual for the boiler – if your property doesn't have a copy, ask your landlord for one or look up the boiler model online – this will help you to find out about any potential faults with the system, and what you need to do should they occur.
- Set the thermostat to between 18-21°C - the best temperature for rooms in your home varies between rooms, 18°C is best for bedrooms, living rooms or studies should be around 20°C, but generally ideal room temperature doesn't exceed 22°C.
 - Every degree warmer that a thermostat is set at above 22°C can increase your energy usage by 10%.
 - **Turning your thermostat temperature higher won't heat your home up faster!**

Setting heating:

- Programme your heating to switch off when you're out of the house, e.g., at university or work if you don't work from home. You can also turn the heating off when you're in bed.
- Set the heating to turn on about half an hour before you get home or get up in the mornings. This way, you will keep the house warm when it needs to be, and won't pay for the heat you're not using.

Radiators:

- Make sure your radiators work properly – they may have trapped air instead of them, which would prevent them from heating up all around. Get in touch with your landlord or estate agent to bleed the radiators if this is the case – you will notice this may have happened if the radiators only feel lukewarm when they are switched on, or feel hot and cold in different patches.
- Keep radiators clear – furniture or other items in front of or on the radiators will block the heat from getting around the room. Move it away and the room will heat up faster.
- Put radiator reflectors behind any radiators on external walls – this prevents heat loss to the outside by reflecting it back into the room.

Energy and money saving tips

Use your curtains effectively

- Open them in the morning to let the sun in during the day, or when outside is warmer than the inside of your home.

- Close them when it gets dark to create a layer of insulating air between the windows and the inside of your home. Look out for the gaps in curtains and make sure no cold air can seep through.
- Heavy or thermal curtains are the best for this purpose – you could also make or buy thermal lining to attach to the curtains that you have already – speak to your landlord first though before you make any changes!

Draught-proofing (where possible)

- If there are gaps in the sealant around your windows, ask the landlord/agency to reseal them.
 - You could also request the installation of draught-proofing strips and door sweeps to the windows and doors, as well as keyhole covers or a draught excluder to your letterbox.
- Put up window insulation film – just bear in mind that you might not be able to open the window without removing the film first!
- Put draught snakes at the bottom of draughty doors to the outside – alternatively, you can use rolled up blankets or towels.
- Close doors to rooms which you don't heat or where you are leaving a window open (e.g., for drying clothes). To keep heat downstairs, close the doors to the hallway/staircase. You can also hang blankets over exterior doors or to close off the staircase.

Use residual heat in the kitchen

- The oven and the stove or hob generate a lot of heat.
 - Leave the oven door open after use so any residual heat can dissipate around the kitchen, or the home if you leave the kitchen door open too.

Lighting

- Switch any old incandescent, spotlight or halogen lightbulbs to LED, which can save around £30 per year on electricity bills. Make sure you take any bulbs that you have bought yourself with you when you move out too!
- Switch lights off when not in use.

Use appliances efficiently

- Turn off appliances when not in use and avoid using any standby functions, as this wastes energy. The small surge in energy created when any electrical product is turned on is much

smaller than the energy used in standby when it is not needed, especially with older devices.

- Only boil the water you need in the kettle – you can measure the water in the mug that you plan to use for a hot drink, for example.
- A microwave uses less energy than an electric oven on full power, but don't use it unnecessarily – plan your meals so that you can defrost food throughout the day ready for your evening meal so that you don't need to rely on your microwave to defrost frozen food.
- Defrost your freezer regularly as ice build-up can make it less efficient. If your fridge-freezer isn't filled with food, keep containers filled with water in it to help it run more efficiently.
- When you are replacing appliances, look for the highest energy rating that you can afford. The [Energy Saving Trust](#) have a helpful article to explain how energy ratings work for different appliances.
- Reduce the temperature of your washing machine – many detergents now work well at 30°C.
- Cut back your dishwasher and washing machine use by just one cycle per week and save £8 worth of energy a year on each appliance. Make sure to only run dishwashers and washing machines when they are full.

Ventilation and condensation

Inadequate ventilation can lead to poor indoor air quality, condensation and mould growth, which in turn can affect occupants' health and damage your belongings, or even the building itself.

During the colder months, condensation becomes a major problem in many British homes. It appears when warm moist air hits a cold surface such as a window or external wall and condenses, forming water droplets. Kitchens and bathrooms are areas most prone to it, and it is exacerbated by poor air movement in areas such as corners of rooms and behind wardrobes and furnishings.

Condensation can cause peeling wallpaper and stained wall surfaces, rotting window frames, and can damage furniture and clothing. It can also encourage mould growth and dust mites, and increase the risk of illnesses like asthma and bronchitis.

It is important to remember that as a tenant, you are responsible for any damage you cause to the property you are renting. Any repair costs could be taken from your security deposit – this could include damage caused by inadequate ventilation or heating.

Tips and advance for condensation and damp reduction:

Reduce the moisture:

- Keep bathroom and kitchen doors closed when cooking and bathing to stop moisture spreading to the rest of the house.

- Dry laundry outside if possible. If drying clothes indoors use an airer, close the door and open a window. If you have space, you could also use a dehumidifier.
- Avoid putting wet items directly on radiators as it prevents the heat from circulating, making the boiler work harder and increasing energy costs.
- Keep lids on saucepans while cooking.

Let the moisture out:

- Leave trickle vents open at all times – these are small vents built into frames of modern windows that help to circulate air, even when windows are closed.
- Air out rooms that people use regularly, especially bedrooms, by opening windows widely for at least 10mins per day. A lot of moisture is produced by just breathing, and this helps to prevent build up.
- Use extractor fans in bathrooms and kitchens when cooking or drying laundry, and open windows when they steam up to prevent build up and mould growth.
- Air cupboards and wardrobes, and avoid putting too much in them as this stops air from circulating.
- Move furniture away from the walls and leave a ventilation gap.

Heat your home

- Try to keep temperatures in all rooms above 15°C. This will cut down the risk of condensation forming on walls and fabrics – it may still form on windows when the temperature outside is cold but make sure to wipe this away when you see it.