Rate Your Landlord 2011-12 - The Report.
Introduction

‘Rate Your Landlord’ was introduced in 2010 and run in its second year from November 2011 to January 2012. The campaign was introduced to gain feedback from students living in off-campus accommodation and find out their experiences living in the private rented sector with a landlord or agent.

‘Rate Your Landlord’ is based on asking students a simple question; ‘Would you recommend your landlord/agent to a friend?’ Students could rate their experience from the academic year 2011-12 and 2010-11.

From that we were able to compile a list of landlords and agents that received a high satisfaction rate from students. We compiled the list based on landlords and agents who received more than 10 responses in either or both years and gained at least a 60% positive recommendation. It’s also a useful way of finding out more general information about students living in the private rented sector.

Feedback from last year’s project told us that students also wanted the opportunity to rate their University managed accommodation on campus, so this year we included a specific section for students to do that.

The survey was developed in consultation with Kent Union’s full and part time officers, Kent Union’s Advice Centre and current students. Local landlords were given a presentation on the last year’s report and given the opportunity to tell us what questions they would like to see asked and landlords accredited with the Canterbury Student Housing Accreditation Scheme were notified about the campaign when it launched.

We sent out the survey to students via email and social networking sites – we also ran a visual and interactive campaign for students to tell us what they thought made a good landlord. The survey received 551 responses.

Key findings

- The majority of students would recommend their landlord or agents to a friend; 63% in 2011-12 and 61% in 2010-11.
- 64% of students said they were aware that their deposit had been put in a tenancy deposit protection scheme. This was a large improvement on last year where 51% said they didn’t know.
- A quarter of students reported that it took over two months to settle their deposit with their landlord and receive their money back.
- On average students will view at least three properties before signing a tenancy agreement.
- Nearly half of students (47%) said they felt rushed or pressured into signing up for a property.
- 58% of students predominately pay their rent with their student loan, bursary or grant.
- 91% of students said they would recommend their University managed accommodation to a friend.
- 16% of students reported owning a car and keeping it for use in Canterbury, a 9% decrease on last year.
**Viewing and choosing a property**

We find that many students are under the impression that they need to find a house quickly or risk not getting one/getting a bad deal and that sometimes landlords may rush students into signing up for a house. Our survey proved this, as almost half (47%) said they felt rushed or pressured into signing up for a property. We are continually working on challenging this myth about the rush, so we asked students when they signed their tenancy agreement to get some fact based evidence around it.

As we expected, this shows that students sign their tenancy agreements right throughout the year meaning there are is a wide of properties available and no need to rush. The response showed in comparison to last year a shift towards more students signing up for a house after Christmas.

Students can often rush through the viewing process due to the pressure they feel, so may feel obliged to sign up for a property having only seen one, or sometimes none\(^1\). However our survey showed that students will on average look at least three properties before making a decision and signing a tenancy agreement.

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\(^1\) Students should always avoid where possible signing up to rent a property unseen.
Fees and deposits

Students will often pay out large amounts of money in fees and deposits. Over the two academic years, 73% of respondents said that they paid a deposit and 63% said they paid a non-refundable admin fee. The average admin fee from across the respondents was £136. We asked students whether they paid any other types of fees – common answers were holding fees, retainers, handling fees, advance rent, check in & check out fees and referencing fees. If already paying an admin fee, students should be wary of paying for any other types of fees as these services should usually be included in an admin fee. If a student is asked to pay a different type of fee in waive of a deposit, students should also be cautious as they won’t receive protection in the same way they do with a deposit.

64% of respondents that paid deposits said it was protected in a tenancy deposit scheme and were aware of this. This showed a huge improvement from last year where 51% said they ‘weren’t sure’ whether it was protected or not – we have since been doing a lot of work to educate students around deposit protection which has shown to have had an impact. 10% of respondents reported that their deposit had not been protected, which is illegal.

One of the biggest concerns for outgoing tenants is getting their deposit back. For those who answered from the 2010-11 academic year, 35% said they got their full deposit back, with 29% receiving some back and 5% not getting their deposit back (the rest remained in the same property so did not settle their deposit that year). The most common reason for a deposit deduction was for cleaning charges (68%).

Often we see students coming to us in the summer who are having trouble getting their deposits back. This led us to ask students how long it took to settle their deposit and receive their money back.

The answers showed lengthy waiting times, with over a third having to wait up to and over two months and over a quarter up to and over three months.

A quarter of students who would not recommend their landlord said it was because of the speed in which their deposit was returned and handled.

“After paying a total of £600 in admin fees the agents did not respond to our problems quickly and had to be repeatedly pestered to do anything.”

“It was a lot of money to pay before moving in”
**Would you recommend your landlord/agent to a friend?**

Students were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘I would recommend my landlord/agent to a friend’.

The majority of student said they would recommend – 63% in 2011/12 and 61% in 2010/11.

In order to produce a list of recommended landlords by students we looked at all those who’d received 10 or more responses in either or both academic years. These are the landlords where over 60% of students agreed that they would recommend them:

### 2011/12*

- David Apthorp – 100%
- Sandersons – 75%
- Matthew Wooley – 71%
- Stephen Dean 63%
- Your Move – 62%
- Jon Gauld – 61%

### 2010/11*

- David Apthorp – 82%
- Jon Gauld – 70%

*Those not included in the list did not necessarily score lowly; they may have received less than 10 ratings.

Students were given the opportunity to tell us why they voted that way. We provided a range of options based on common answers we received last year, and there was also a free text box for students to write comments.

**Why would students recommend their landlord/agent?**

The top three reasons students said they would recommend their landlord were:

- *Property was in a good location* – 76%
- *Friendly and personable* – 70%
- *Property was good quality/well maintained* – 67%
Popular comments noted the landlord striking a balance between going the extra mile (providing useful information, being friendly & developing a relationship with the tenant) and leaving the tenants to have quiet enjoyment of the property when they weren’t needed. There were also comments about speed at responding to problems, being helpful and understanding if there were issues paying rent, and being ‘fair’ when it came to returning the deposit.

“I had a few issues with my house mates last year and the agency were very supportive and also friendly on the phone and in person. They were reliable and easy to talk to. They always emailed before turning up with viewers and other than that, left us to ourselves. I couldn’t have asked for better people to help me settle in. They still remember me and have since emailed me to see how I am doing.”

“Our landlord was awesome. Brilliant house and very cheap rent. Always came round when we needed something but wasn’t constantly checking up on us. Also he gave a really good reference for all of us when we left uni and needed to rent privately and even got us a Christmas present!”

“When we moved in he provided us with a folder containing a timetable for bins, info on our deposits as well as the leaflets so we knew how to use the appliances.”

Why wouldn’t students recommend their landlord/agent?
The top three reasons students said they wouldn’t recommend their landlord were:
Property was not of good quality/well maintained – 74%

Poor communication – 69%

Speed at responding to problems – 64%

Other common problems were around the landlord being intrusive and not giving notice before coming around or giving viewings, the property not being in good condition when moved in (or things that were agreed had not been provided/fixed\(^2\)), being patronising or talking down to tenants, not keeping on top of mould or damp in properties or helping students deal with it, and being unhelpful with poor internet connections that had been provided through a bills package. Outgoing tenants had lots of dissatisfaction with returns of deposits.

“Even though the contract states so, they don’t give us 24 hours notice [sometimes a few hours or not at all] and, a few days ago, she did not even knock on the door but let herself in.”

“He only fixed problems quickly and not properly. For instance rather than replace a broken fire alarm on the ceiling, he just taped it together.”

“Agent said the house would be professionally cleaned when we moved in, but it definitely wasn’t. It seems like agents and landlords are constantly charging outgoing tenants for cleaning, but the new tenants don’t often see the result.”

“Although she is mostly good landlady, she can be a bit overbearing and not understand the boundaries between landlady and tenant which makes us feel uncomfortable sometimes.”

\(^2\) We recommend that students always get any agreements in writing.
University managed accommodation

From the first year of the project, lots of students wanted to rate the University as an accommodation manager for their on campus accommodation so this year we gave them that opportunity in a specific section.

Similar to our questions about landlords and agents we also asked whether students would recommend their University managed accommodation to a friend. This question showed a very high satisfaction in students, with 91% agreeing that they would recommend to a friend.

"Living in University managed accommodation made settling in to first year easy and the University were fast at corresponding with any problems about the house or rent via email. The cleaners were also efficient and helpful."

The accommodation office staff are friendly, knowing we are international students and helping us to adjust and handle any problems. They are great when you miss home and they are still giving you a hand!

"The response speed is mixed; one of the people I know has had their window broken for months now but they have yet to fix it but when the lights went out in the flat below me they were round straight away to get them working again."

We also took the opportunity to ask students what their priority was when they first applied for their University accommodation – we gave them a list of options with the space to write any other we hadn’t thought of. The most popular answer was to have an en suite room at 43%, however a large trend on the ‘other’ section revolved around wanting to have a kitchen and be in self-catered accommodation.

We wanted to know whether their priority would change since living in the accommodation. Over a quarter (27%) said their priority would change, with the majority of those (44%) citing cost as their new top priority. This proved to us something we have long known from anecdotal evidence that students often feel they need to prioritise an en suite room, but once having lived there and paid the rent they feel it’s not cost effective or that they struggle with the cost.
It was also useful for us to find out that the majority of respondents (58%) predominately pay their rent from their student loan, bursary or grant. This is worrying given that there are currently no self-catered options that cost in the region of the basic maintenance loan a student receives, and only two bed and breakfast options that are in this region (which leaves students without full catered provision). Therefore students may struggle to make up the rest of the money to pay their rent, as well as find money for living costs – particularly students from low income backgrounds who may not get financial support from family. When asked if they thought the University accommodation was good value for money, only 39% of respondents answered ‘yes’.

“The only true problem was the cost, which was far in excess of my student loan.”

Unsurprisingly the issue of kitchens and self catered accommodation came through very strongly again, with lots of students commenting that they really struggled without having a kitchen.

“The only downside was the lack of oven/extra cooking space and that we had to rely on the Dining Hall, where the food didn’t meet the expected standard, in my opinion. The catered option is not a very viable set up for students any more, and I don’t think it is cost effective.”

“Lack of real kitchen makes it extremely difficult to eat properly; I really suffered in my first year and it affected both my studies and my overall enjoyment.”

3 Based on the minimum maintenance loan granted outside London against the prices of undergraduate accommodation in the University Accommodation Price List 2011-12
**Recommendations**

**For students**

1. Use the Canterbury Student Housing Accreditation scheme to find a property – [www.canterburystudenthousing.org.uk](http://www.canterburystudenthousing.org.uk)
2. Don’t rush into signing up for a property - take your time looking around and try to look at as many different options as you can.
3. Make sure you know what you’re paying for regarding any fees, and ensure any deposit you pay is protected. Pick up a copy of the new Housing Guide from the University Accommodation Office or Kent Union buildings, or download a copy here: [www.kentunion.co.uk/housingweek](http://www.kentunion.co.uk/housingweek)
4. Use your Vice-President (Welfare) ([union-welfare@kent.ac.uk](mailto:union-welfare@kent.ac.uk)) or Kent Union’s Advice Centre for any housing problems you encounter – [www.kentunion.co.uk/advice](http://www.kentunion.co.uk/advice)

**For landlords & agents**

1. Join the Canterbury Student Housing Accreditation scheme.
2. Avoid rushing students into signing up; ensure they are aware of all the details & what their money is paying for.
3. Signpost students to Kent Union’s Advice Centre who may be having problems (e.g. financial, personal) – [www.kentunion.co.uk/advice](http://www.kentunion.co.uk/advice)
4. Ensure that deposits are being returned in a fair time frame.

**For the University**

1. Continue to be a working partner in the Canterbury Student Housing Accreditation Scheme.
2. Ensure that pricing information of accommodation continues to be a key feature when corresponding with students applying for accommodation, including how it works in context with maintenance loans and student living.
3. Investigate longer term how and if the catered accommodation will be continue to be a suitable and effective option for students.
4. Review the cost of on campus accommodation and how the University can provide affordable housing for all students in a range of options.

**For Kent Union**

1. Take over the Canterbury Student Housing Accreditation scheme from Canterbury City Council, and continue to use it as a key feature in any future Housing Weeks or other related activity.
2. Continue to educate students on the questions they should ask when signing up for a property and the legal requirements of both the landlord and them as a tenant.
3. Continue to investigate how we can recognise smaller landlords in any future Rate Your Landlord projects.
4. Run workshops in the summer term educating students about deposit returns and giving them tips on how they can get their full deposit back.