A fair guide to comparing student accommodation prices

Finding the right place to live during university is rarely just about the monthly rent. The headline figure on a listing can look like a bargain, yet the total cost of living there might be higher than another property with a steeper price tag. For students navigating the UK market, learning how to compare student accommodation prices fairly means looking beyond the base rate and considering what is actually included.

Private purpose-built student accommodation (often called PBSA) has become a popular choice across UK university cities. These buildings are designed specifically for students, with features that older shared houses often lack. But each property sets its own pricing structure, and the differences can be confusing. To make a fair comparison, you need a consistent method that accounts for all the variables.



Step 1: identify the true weekly or monthly cost

Most student accommodation is advertised as a weekly rent, but some properties quote a monthly figure. The first step is to convert everything to the same period. A weekly rent multiplied by 52 and divided by 12 gives you a monthly equivalent; conversely, a monthly figure multiplied by 12 and divided by 52 gives you a weekly rate. Once the numbers are on the same timescale, you can start comparing.

Watch out for properties that advertise a low weekly rent but require a 44-week or 48-week contract. If you need to stay in the city for the full academic year, a 44-week contract might leave you paying for alternative accommodation during the summer. On the other hand, a slightly higher weekly rent on a 50-week or 52-week contract could work out cheaper overall if you would otherwise have to find and pay for summer housing.

Step 2: check what the rent includes

Two properties can have identical weekly rents yet very different total costs. The reason lies in what is covered. Look for the following:



- Bills: does the rent include water, electricity, gas and internet? If not, you need to budget separately for these. In some cities, utility costs can add a significant amount to your monthly outgoings.
- Contents insurance: many PBSA providers include basic contents insurance in the rent. Others charge extra or leave you to arrange your own.

- Cleaning and maintenance: some buildings include regular cleaning of communal areas and a maintenance service. Check whether these are factored into the price.
- Gym or social spaces: a few properties offer free access to an on-site gym or common room. While not essential, these extras can add value that justifies a higher rent.

When you compare student accommodation prices, create a checklist of what is included at each property. Then add the estimated cost of anything not included to the advertised rent. That adjusted figure is the real price you would pay.

Step 3: understand the deposit and upfront payments

The initial financial outlay can vary significantly. A property with a lower weekly rent might ask for a larger deposit or require you to pay the first term's rent in one lump sum. Others might offer a smaller deposit and monthly instalments. To compare fairly, calculate the total cash you need before moving in and the monthly payment schedule after that. A lower upfront cost can help with cash flow, but a higher deposit is usually refundable at the end of the tenancy.

Watch for administration fees or booking fees. Some operators charge a non-refundable reservation fee to hold a room, which is deducted from the first rent payment. Others charge a separate fee for signing the contract. These one-off costs should be added to your total for the year to get a true picture.

Step 4: factor in location and transport costs

A room that is far from campus might have a cheaper rent, but the cost and time of commuting can cancel out the saving. Calculate how much you would spend on bus passes, train tickets or cycling maintenance each month. If the cheaper property is a 30-minute bus ride from your lectures, the annual transport cost could be substantial. Conversely, a property next to the university might let you save on travel and gain extra study or social time.

Also consider the local area. A property in a city centre may have higher rent but lower grocery prices if a supermarket is nearby. A suburban property might have cheaper rent but require you to buy a bus pass and spend more on food if shops are further away. These trade-offs matter when you compare student accommodation prices fairly.

Step 5: compare the length of contract and flexibility

Not all contracts are the same. Some run for the standard academic year (September to June), while others offer 44, 48, 50 or 52 weeks. If you are an international student who plans to stay in the UK over the summer, a longer contract might save you the hassle and cost of finding

short-term housing. If you go home for the summer, a shorter contract could be more economical.



Check the cancellation policy too. Some properties allow you to leave early with a notice period or a penalty, while others hold you to the full term. Life at university can change unexpectedly, so knowing the flexibility of your contract is part of a fair price comparison.

Step 6: look at the quality of the room and building

A lower rent might reflect an older building with smaller rooms, shared bathrooms, or poor insulation. A higher rent often buys a newer build with en suite facilities, a larger room, better soundproofing and modern heating. Visit or at least view detailed photos and floor plans. A room that is 10% cheaper but 30% smaller may not be a good deal. Similarly, a property with poor energy efficiency could mean higher heating bills in winter, especially if bills are not included.

Hallbookers, Student Accommodation UK student halls by price makes it easier to see the range of options side by side. By filtering properties by weekly rent and then reading what is included, you can quickly narrow down the list to those that offer the best value for your needs.

Step 7: read reviews and talk to current residents

Price is only one part of the equation. A cheap room in a poorly managed building can turn into a miserable experience. Look for reviews from previous or current residents about the condition of the property, the responsiveness of management, and the general atmosphere. If possible, visit the building during term time and ask a resident how they find living there. Their answers can reveal hidden costs, such as unreliable heating, noisy neighbours or slow maintenance, that no listing will mention.

When you compare student accommodation prices, treat the monthly rent as a starting point, not the final answer. The real cost includes everything you pay from the day you move in until the day you move out, plus the quality of your experience while you are there.

Hallbookers, Student Accommodation UK student halls by price provides a platform where you can see many of these details in one place. By using the filters and reading the property descriptions, you can build a shortlist based on your personal priorities. Whether you value an en suite bathroom, a large desk, or a quiet study area, the tool helps you weigh the trade-offs without having to visit every building in person.



Putting it all together

To compare student accommodation prices fairly, work through these steps in order. Convert all rents to the same time period. Add the cost of any bills or services not included. Calculate the upfront fees and deposit. Factor in transport and location costs. Consider the contract

length and flexibility. Assess the room quality and building standards. And finally, gather honest feedback from current residents. By the time you have done this for a handful of properties, you will have a clear picture of which one truly offers the best value for your budget and lifestyle.

Remember that the cheapest option on paper is not always the cheapest in practice. A fair comparison saves you money, time and stress, leaving you free to focus on what really matters during your time at university.

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