

The average student spends over £500 each year on energy bills so we've put together some top tips to help you to minimise your expenditure in rented accommodation!

When looking for a property

All rented accommodation will have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) and the landlord is legally obliged to let you see a copy of this. The EPC has an A to G rating system, where G is the poorest level of energy efficiency and A is the best. The average EPC rating of a property in the UK is a D rating and if you want to minimise your energy costs then you should seek out a property which is D-rated or better.

The EPC will also have a list of recommendations for making the house more energy efficient and we recommend that you ask your landlord to carry out at least all of the 'low cost' measures.

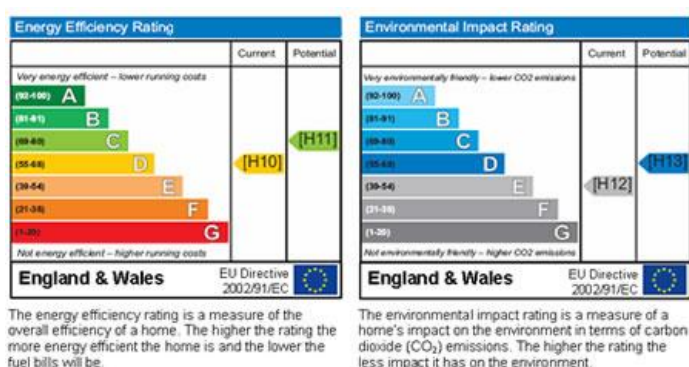


Figure 1: An Energy Performance Certificate

When looking around a property, it's important to look out for the tell-tale signs of a poorly insulated or hard-to-heat property – mould, damp and condensation. Living in a mouldy, damp property can have a significant impact on your wellbeing so try and avoid properties that have evidence of these problems – or ask the landlord to take action to address them before you move in (e.g. by improving the insulation of the property, installing ventilation or by providing a de-humidifier).

The Energy Performance Certificate will include information on the insulation levels of the property but when you visit the property you should check that the windows shut properly and whether the property is draughty. These will have an impact on how much it costs to heat the property so again, if there are problems, ask the landlord to fix them before you move in.



Figure 2: Examples of mould and condensation

When living in a property

Once you've moved into your property there are loads of things you can do to make sure you minimise your energy expenditure while staying warm.

1) Get smart!

Our first recommendation is to contact your energy company to request a smart meter. Smart meters are the new generation of electricity and gas meters being rolled out across Great Britain. They let you know how much energy you are using in near real-time so you can see exactly how much you are spending on energy (rather than waiting months for your first energy bill, as used to be the case). Once you have a smart meter you can get your energy bills under control by using the in-home display that comes with the smart meter to identify what in your house is using loads of energy!

Smart meters are completely free for you and if you pay the energy bill yourself all you need to do is contact your energy provider to express your interest in getting a smart meter. The time it takes to get one installed will depend on where you live and which energy company you are with. When you get a smart meter installed you don't need to notify your landlord but it's good practice to do so anyway out of courtesy!



Get yourself a smart meter!

Check out our video [here](#) which provides information on the benefit of smart meters to students and also look at the Smart Energy GB website [here](#) which has loads of FAQs on smart meters.

2) Waste less energy

Smart meters help you to easily identify energy wastage in your property but whether you have a smart meter or not, there are loads of things you can do to reduce your wastage.

When it comes to your heating make sure you...

- Keep warm by putting on layers and closing curtains and windows to keep the heat in.
- Learn how to programme your boiler so that you're not running the heating 24/7.
- Ensure that you open windows to get rid of moisture (e.g. after a shower/cooking) even when it's cold. It requires more energy to heat moist air than dry air so by getting rid of the excess moisture you will use less energy to heat the house – it will also reduce the chance of damp, mould and condensation too.
- Fit some really simple low cost measures like "radiator panels" and "secondary glazing film" – just search on the internet to find more information about them.

When it comes to electricity/gas usage...

- Switch off lights and appliances when not in use!
- Put a lid on your pan when you're cooking (it reduces condensation too)
- Cook big meals with your flatmates – it saves time, energy is sociable and often reduces food waste too!

- Allow your food to cool down before putting it in the fridge/freezer so it cools naturally first
- Defrost your freezer when you get a build-up of ice – it makes it run more efficiently
- Don't overfill the kettle
- Take shorter showers (again, it reduces condensation too)
- Wash clothes at lower temperatures – 30°C is fine for most clothes
- Make sure all your light bulbs are energy efficient. Even if the bulbs are a bit more expensive at the shop, you'll probably end up paying less over the year in the running costs.



If there are structural problems with the property that make it hard to heat (e.g. poor insulation, leaky windows, poor central heating) then put those problems in writing in an e-mail to your landlord/lettings agency. Contact your students' union, college, university or local council if you need support in asking your landlord/lettings agency to improve the property.

3) Pay less for your energy

If you pay the energy bills yourself (as opposed to them being paid for by your landlord), then you have the right to switch energy supplier. Check out any of the various price comparison website to see if you can switch to a better deal – the average household can save around £200 a year by switching supplier!

Some tariffs have different rates for day (peak-time) usage and night (off-peak) usage so in those cases you can also save money by moving some of your energy usage (e.g. washing clothes, heating the property) to the off-peak times. In many cases this also helps to reduce your carbon footprint as off-peak electricity tends to have a higher percentage produced by renewable energy sources, happy days!

Useful links

- Join the NUS Student Switch Off+ private rented sector advice newsletter for monthly tips on energy/money saving – sign-up via the form at the bottom of [this webpage](#).
- For detailed advice on how to save energy in your home, check out the [Energy Saving Trust](#) website.
- For information on smart meters check out the [Smart Energy GB](#) website.
- For information on your right as a tenant to switch supplier, check out this [really useful site](#) from Ofgem (the people who regulate the energy industry).
- For more general information on your rights as a tenant, not just related to energy, check out the resources on the [Ready to Rent](#) website!