



LSESU REVIEW OF ACCOMMODATION PROVIDERS

during the COVID-19 Pandemic



[LSESU.COM](https://www.lsesu.com)

Introduction:

This guide has been put together with the aim of informing prospective, incoming and current students of how providers treated student tenants in the 2020-21 academic year, especially during the January lockdown of 2021. While we hope COVID-19 will not affect the next academic year, we felt it was important for students to be aware of the following information in the unfortunate case that we are faced with similar circumstances in the future. This evaluation was constructed based on student complaints, cases from the LSESU Advice Service and our own correspondence with the providers.

There are many other factors to consider in your choice such as location, proximity to campus, price etc. that have not been factored into the table below. Ultimately, what's important is that you have choice and you deserve to have full clarity on how providers have acted and operated this year.

Table:

This table compares the following providers of accommodation on their COVID-19 contract flexibility, if they offered rent reductions during the pandemic, how easy it is to get out of a contract (due to COVID, an emergency etc.), and the Student Union's experience of how the provider treated student tenants in the 20/21 academic year:

	<p>Who holds your contract?</p> <p>If LSE do not hold your contract, they cannot influence any contract issue you have with your provider.</p>	<p>Did they offer contract flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic?</p> <p>This includes allowing those not in residence who were unable to return to end their contracts early.</p>	<p>Did they offer a rent reduction during the national lockdown which began in June 2021?</p>	<p>How does someone get out of their contract once they've moved in?</p>	<p>Facilities provided?</p> <p>Did they keep these open during the pandemic when government guidance allowed them to? If not, did they reduce their fees consequently?</p>	<p>LSESU's perspective on potential points for LSE students to consider before taking out accommodation contracts.</p>
<p>LSE-owned Halls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Bankside · Passfield · High Holborn · Roseberry · Butlers Wharf · Carr-Saunders 	<p>LSE</p>	<p>Yes, somewhat.</p>	<p>No. While LSE allowed students to end their contracts early, they did not offer a rent reduction for those who remained in Halls</p>	<p>Students must find a replacement student to take over their room and move in. Exceptional circumstances like illness are considered on a case-by-case basis.</p>	<p>Some Halls (e.g. Bankside) had their common spaces closed during the lockdowns. Study spaces were prioritised and kept open in all halls.</p>	<p>LSE agreed to drop the holding fee (£25 p/w) for those who ended their contract but could not collect their belongings after Union lobbying and student dissatisfaction</p> <p>Students at LSE Halls set up the Rent Strike Now campaign after LSE's call not to offer rent reductions for those staying in Halls during lockdown.</p>

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University of London-owned Halls	The University of London	Yes, somewhat.	No. While they allowed students to end their contracts early, they did not offer a rent reduction for those who remained in Halls.	Students must find a replacement student to take over their room and move in. Exceptional circumstances like illness are considered on a case-by-case basis.	Study rooms were kept open.	Students have no union protection (there is no UoL SU) but UoL took on a similar COVID-19 contract policy as LSE. UoL, however, kept a holding fee of £25 p/w over the lockdown for those who had ended their contract but could not collect their belongings.
Sidney Webb House	Your contract is with LSE, but the building is operated by Unite	Yes, somewhat.	No. While they allowed students to end their contracts early, they did not offer a rent reduction for those who remained in Halls.	Students must find a replacement student to take over their room and move in. Exceptional circumstances like illness are considered on a case-by-case basis.	LSESU was told by tenants that the gym remained closed (even during periods where gyms were allowed to open) but no discount was offered..	Because the contract is owned by LSE, you have more protection than private halls. However, the SU received a number of complaints regarding the behaviour of receptionist staff at Sidney Webb. Cleaning was also suspended for a period of time and students complained to LSESU that they were not informed of this.

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Urbanest including Westminster and Kings Cross	Urbanest (private company)	No. Urbanest only agreed to review contracts on a case-by-case basis and did not implement a blanket COVID-19 contract flexibility policy.	Yes. Some of their residents were eligible for a 30% discount for a period of the January lockdown.	Students must find a replacement student to take over their room and move in. Exceptional circumstances like illness are considered on a case-by-case basis.	Common rooms were kept open.	A campaign was launched by LSE students in response to Urbanest's policy position on contracts during the pandemic which they felt was unfair and received support from Florence Eshalomi MP.
Lillian Knowles House (PG only)	Sanctuary Students (private company)	No. Sanctuary Students refused to allow any contract flexibility during the entire pandemic (from March 2020 – present). This makes them an outlier to the private sector standard as most offered contract breaks for those hit by the first lockdown in Spring 2020.	No. They refused to offer a rent discount as they claimed it allows them to offer low-cost housing to vulnerable individuals.	Students must find a replacement student to take over their room and move in. Exceptional circumstances like illness are considered on a case-by-case basis.	Unknown	Sanctuary Students was (to our knowledge) the only provider who did not allow students to leave their contracts early during the first wave of the pandemic in Spring 2020. Its refusal to allow students out of contracts even in exceptional circumstances or serious financial hardship places Sanctuary as an outlier to the rest of the University Halls providers.

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Student Roost Halls	Student Roost (private company)	No. Student Roost did not implement a blanket COVID-19 contract flexibility policy.	Yes. They offered a 100% rent discount/waive from January for those not in residence, for a total of 10 weeks.	Students must find a replacement student to take over their room and move in. Exceptional circumstances like illness are considered on a case-by-case basis.	Study rooms and common spaces were kept open. Reopened gyms when allowed.	Of the private accommodation providers, Student Roost appeared more compassionate in their treatment of student tenants during the pandemic (e.g. by extending their rent discount during the lockdown). They were also engaged in correspondence with LSESU during attempts to negotiate contract flexibility. However, they did not allow for much contract flexibility for those who wanted to leave their contracts early due to covid.

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Unite Students Halls	Unite Students (private company)	No. Their cancellation policy remained unchanged (see column 5)	Yes. Some of their residents were eligible for a 50% rent discount which ran from 18 January 2021 up to 28 March 2021. They also offered a 'summer extension' where students can extend their contract for 4 weeks in the summer for free due to COVID disruption.	Students must find a replacement student to take over their room and move in. They may be charged a £50 fee depending on when the new tenant moves in	Unknown	Unite offered an extended rent discount and the unique offer of an extended 'summer' rent period for free. They did not offer flexibility by allowing people to leave their contracts early without finding a replacement.
Scape including Wembley location	Scape (private company)	No flexibility appears to have been offered to residents since the beginning of the January national lockdown.	Unknown	Students must find a replacement student to take over their room and move in.	Unknown	Very few LSE students use Scape Halls.

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IQ Students Halls	IQ Students (private company)	No concessions. Even for students not in-residence over the January lockdown who were unable to return due to government restrictions, IQ did not offer a rent reduction or relax its contract cancellation policy.	No	Students must find a replacement student to take over their room and move in.	Unknown	Few LSE students use IQ. The only concession advertised on their website appears to be to allow those who hadn't moved in at all, to delay their contract date to March 2021 as opposed to allowing them out of their contract.

**Even though LSE attempted to persuade Urbanest to soften its COVID contract policies, Urbanest refused and this highlights that because LSE is contracted to fill a certain number of rooms in Urbanest Westminster, they have very limited power to push Urbanest to change.

A Note on Private Landlords:

Many LSE students rent accommodation from private landlords. We have not included these in the above table as there are too many distinct landlords. In our experience, the general stance taken by private landlords was that students could only be released from their contract if either a) a replacement was found or b) there was a pre-existing break clause in the contract. Rent reductions were practically non-existent across the private rental sector, although some landlords were more sympathetic to late payments than others. It was more common for tenancy agreements with private landlords to have break clauses which allowed for greater flexibility, however those that didn't found it incredibly difficult to achieve any concessions. In general, renting in the private sector can be a bit of a lottery as there is a certain element of luck whether you have a positive or negative experience.

Conclusion

LSESU believes that no provider treated student tenants with the flexibility and compassion they deserved during the pandemic and national lockdowns. However, we believe that students who took out contracts with LSE Halls of Accommodation had the most protection because:

- They were allowed to break or 'pause' their contract if they were not living in their halls during the national lockdown
- LSESU has some influence over the School on issues of accommodation i.e. lobbied the School to drop its room 'holding fee' for left items, and for its contract flexibility
- LSESU has no power or influence over private providers even when they have a relationship with the School (Urbanest, Sanctuary Students)

Laura Goddard, the Community and Welfare Officer states;

“We believe this was symptomatic of the treatment of University students more generally during the pandemic but also illustrates that many private providers will continually place profit over student welfare. Student Roost was more compassionate compared to larger private providers, by offering a 100% rent discount for 10-weeks of the lockdown. However, all providers - including LSE - continue to make it very hard for students to end their contracts by requiring them to find a replacement tenant for their room. While this may be less of an issue in an academic year less or not affected by a pandemic, it is something to consider when looking at contract length.”

The LSESU Advice Service offers free, impartial advice to LSE students on topics related to Halls and Accommodation. For more information about the advice they can provide, click [here](#).