Private Halls vs Shared Houses: Finding Affordable Student Accommodation That Works for You

Choosing where to live during university is one of the biggest decisions a student makes. The two most common options are private purpose-built student accommodation (often called private halls) and a shared house with other students. Both have their advantages, and the right choice depends on your priorities, budget, and lifestyle. This article compares the two to help you decide which offers better value for your money and your university experience.

What Are Private Halls?

Private halls are modern apartment blocks designed specifically for students. They are usually located close to university campuses or city centres and offer a range of room types, from standard en-suite studios to larger apartments with shared living spaces. Unlike traditional university halls, these are run by private companies and often come with a higher level of service and more flexible contract lengths. Hallbookers, Student Accommodation UK



One of the biggest draws of private halls is convenience. You typically get a fully furnished room with a bed, desk, storage, and often a private bathroom. Bills for utilities, internet, and contents insurance are usually included in the rent, so there are no surprise costs. Many buildings also have communal areas such as gyms, study rooms, and social lounges, which can make the transition to university life smoother, especially for first-year students.

What Are Shared Houses?

Shared houses, sometimes called student houses or HMOs (houses in multiple occupation), are regular residential properties let out to groups of students. You and your friends or flatmates rent the whole property together, sharing the kitchen, living room, and often one or two bathrooms. These properties are scattered across residential areas, so you might be further from campus but closer to local shops, parks, and a quieter atmosphere.

The main appeal of shared houses is cost. Because you are splitting the rent and bills among several people, the monthly outlay is often lower than in private halls. You also get more living space for your money, a whole house rather than a single room. However, you must manage

bills yourself (gas, electricity, water, internet), and the property may not be as modern or well-maintained as a private hall.

Comparing Value: What Matters Most?

Value is not just about the rent. It includes the total cost, the quality of living, the social experience, and the peace of mind that comes with your accommodation. Below are the key factors to weigh when deciding between private halls and shared houses.



Total Cost and Hidden Expenses

Private halls charge a single, all-inclusive rent. You know exactly what you pay each month, and there are no surprises. In contrast, a shared house may have a lower headline rent, but you then add on utility bills, internet, TV licence, and possibly a contents insurance policy. These extras can add up to £30, £50 per month per person, narrowing the gap between the two options.

Another factor is the deposit. Private halls often require a lower deposit (sometimes one month's rent), while shared houses typically ask for five to six weeks' rent. If cash flow is tight, the lower upfront cost of halls can be a real advantage.

Contract Length and Flexibility

Private halls usually offer contracts of 42, 44, or 51 weeks, aligning with the academic year. Some even offer shorter stays or the option to renew for a second year. This flexibility is useful if you are not sure about staying in the same city over the summer or if you want to move after your first year.

Shared houses, on the other hand, typically require a 12-month contract. You are committed to paying rent for the whole year, even if you go home for the summer. This can be a disadvantage if you do not sublet or find someone to take your room. However, if you plan to stay in the city over the summer for work or study, a 12-month contract might suit you well.

Location and Commute

Private halls are almost always within walking distance of the university or have excellent transport links. This saves time and money on commuting. Shared houses are often in residential areas a bit further out, which can mean a longer walk or a bus ride to campus. If you have early lectures or evening classes, the convenience of being close to campus is a big plus.

On the other hand, living further out can give you a better sense of the local community and quieter evenings. Some students prefer the separation between university and home life that a shared house provides.

Social Life and Support

Private halls are designed to be social. With communal events, resident assistants, and common areas, it is easy to meet people and make friends. This is particularly valuable for first-year students who are new to the city and want to build a social network quickly.

Shared houses offer a different kind of social life. You live closely with a small group of friends, which can be great for bonding but can also lead to tension if personalities clash. You are more independent and have to sort out your own social life outside the house. This suits students who already have a group of friends they want to live with, or who prefer a quieter, more self-contained environment.



Maintenance and Peace of Mind

In private halls, maintenance is handled by the building management. If something breaks, you report it and it gets fixed quickly. There is no need to chase a landlord or organise repairs yourself. In a shared house, you are responsible for reporting issues to the landlord or letting agent, and response times can vary. You also have to deal with things like changing light bulbs, unblocking drains, and keeping the garden tidy, which some students prefer to avoid.

For many students, the peace of mind that comes with a managed building is worth the extra cost. For others, the lower rent of a shared house is more important, and they are happy to take on a bit more responsibility.

When Private Halls Offer Better Value

Private halls tend to be the better choice if you:

- Are a first-year student who wants a ready-made social scene and the security of a managed building.
- Want all-inclusive bills so you can budget easily without worrying about unexpected costs.
- Prefer a modern, well-furnished room with your own bathroom and good communal facilities.

- Need a shorter or more flexible contract, for example if you are on a placement year or plan to go home for the summer.
- Value convenience and are willing to pay a premium for it, especially if you are not confident about dealing with landlords and bills.

When Shared Houses Offer Better Value

A shared house might be the better option if you:

- Are a second or third-year student with an established friendship group who want to live together.
- Want the lowest possible rent and are prepared to manage bills and take on some household responsibilities.
- Prefer a quieter, more independent lifestyle away from the bustle of a large student block.
- Plan to stay in the city over the summer and can make use of a 12-month contract.
- Like the idea of having a whole house to yourself, with a garden, more space, and the freedom to decorate or arrange the furniture as you like.

Practical Steps to Compare

To work out which option gives you the best value, start by listing your priorities. Write down what matters most: cost, location, social life, contract length, or peace of mind. Then compare a few specific options. Look at the total cost of a private hall room for the academic year, including deposit and any extras. Then look at a shared house and add up the rent plus an estimate for bills (ask current tenants or check typical utility costs for your area).

Visit both types of property if you can. Walk to campus from the shared house to see how long it takes. Ask about the landlord or management company's reputation. Check what is included in the rent: are contents insurance, maintenance, and communal cleaning part of the deal?

For a broad view of what is available in your university city, you can use a search and comparison tool like **Hallbookers, Student Accommodation UK**. This platform lets you filter by location, price, and facilities, making it easier to compare private halls side by side. It also lists contact details so you can arrange viewings and ask questions directly.



Remember that the best value is not always the cheapest option. Paying a bit more for a private hall that includes bills, is close to campus, and offers a social environment might save you money in other ways, such as lower transport costs and less stress. Conversely, a shared house with a low rent might be the perfect choice if you have a group of friends ready to move in and you are happy to manage your own affairs.

Final Thoughts

There is no single answer to the question of which offers better value. Private halls offer convenience, all-inclusive pricing, and a built-in social network, while shared houses offer lower rent, more space, and greater independence. The choice comes down to your personal circumstances and what you value most in your student accommodation.

Whichever you choose, start your search early. Good properties at fair prices go quickly, especially in popular university cities. If you are considering private halls, using a service like **Hallbookers, Student Accommodation UK** can help you see a wide range of options in one place, saving you time and helping you make an informed decision. Whether you end up in a private hall or a shared house, the right accommodation will set you up for a successful and enjoyable time at university.

Hallbookers, Student Accommodation UK on social media Facebook Instagram

YouTube Pinterest