

Contents

Introduction	2
Survey and Focus Group Findings	3
1. Rental Properties in Good Repair	3
2. Rental Properties Having Good Facilities	4
3. Rental Properties Being Well Managed	5
4. Rating of Property Costs	5
5. Rating of Property Locations	6
6. Number of Suitable Properties Found During Search	7
7. Landlord Type	8
8. Satisfaction with Response to Complaints	9
9. Ease of Finding a Suitable Student Let	10
10. Issues Encountered in Accommodation	11
Analysis of Responses to Licensing Questions	12
11. Proposed Licence Conditions for Property Management	12
12. Proposed Licence Conditions for Tenancy Arrangements	13
13. Proposed Licence Conditions for Safety	14
14. Proposed Late Fee	15
15. Proposed Standard Fee of £950	16
16. Introduction of an Additional (HMO) Licensing Scheme	17
Conclusion	18

Introduction

This report presents the findings from a comprehensive research study conducted by Reading Students' Union and University of Reading during July and August 2024. The study aimed to assess student opinions on rental properties, proposed licensing conditions, and associated fees in Reading. The research was executed through two online focus groups and an online survey, collecting responses from a diverse participant group. A total of 26 students participated in the focus groups, while 58 individuals completed the online survey. The objective was to better understand student opinion regarding property management, tenancy arrangements, safety, and the overall condition of rental properties in the area.

Gender and Age Distribution: Among the 58 survey participants, 63.8% identified as female, and 36.2% as male. The age distribution was predominantly within the 20 to 25-year range, with the mean age being approximately 23.7 years.

Nationality and Ethnic Origin:

- UK nationals made up 67.2% of the respondents.
- The remaining 32.8% consisted of smaller groups, with 8.6% identifying as Indian, 3.4% as Nigerian, 3.4% as Mauritian, and 1.7% as Italian.

Regarding ethnic origin:

- English was the most common ethnic origin, representing 74.1% of respondents.
- Other origins included India (5.2%), Nigeria (5.2%), the United Arab Emirates (3.4%), and Mauritius (3.4%).

Student Types and Academic Programmes:

- Undergraduates in their second year (U2) comprised 34.5% of the respondents.
- First-year postgraduates (P1) accounted for 22.4%.
- First-year undergraduates (U1) made up 20.7%.
- Third-year undergraduates (U3) represented 12.1%.
- The remainder, 5.2%, were second-year undergraduates with a year in industry (U2Y).

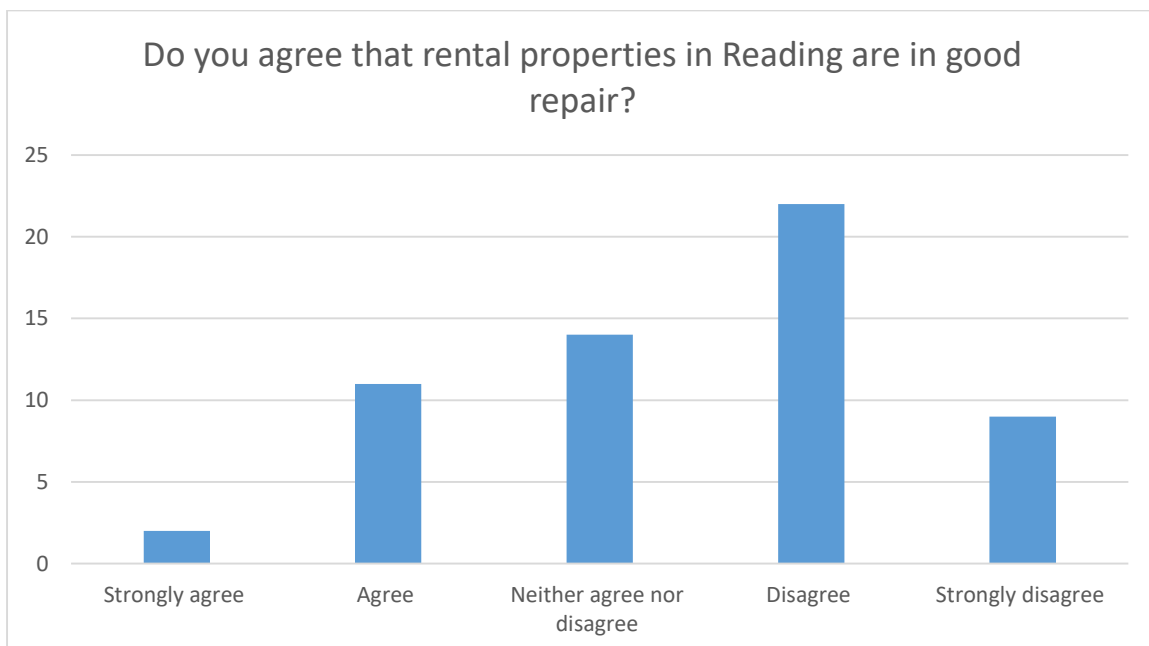
In terms of academic programmes:

- Psychology and Law were represented by 5.2% of participants.
- Zoology with Foundation BSc, Digital Business and Data Analytics MSc FT, and Computer Science with Industrial Year BSc each represented 3.4% of the respondents.

Survey and Focus Group Findings

1. Rental Properties in Good Repair

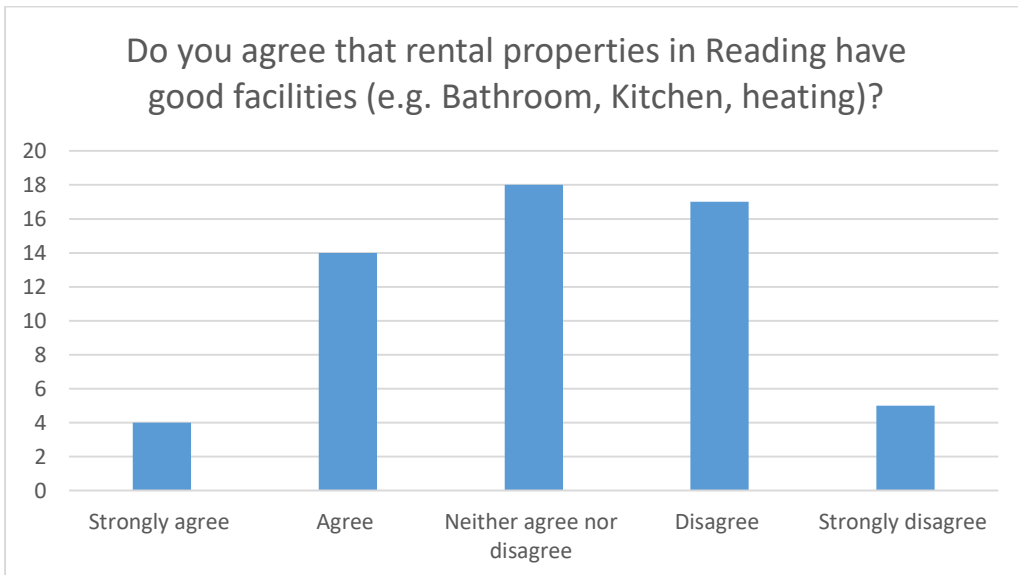
The survey revealed that a significant portion of respondents felt rental properties in Reading were not in good repair. Specifically, 54% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that 'rental properties are in good condition', while a total of only 22% agreed or strongly agreed. This dissatisfaction was mirrored in the focus group discussions, where students frequently raised concerns about poor maintenance and repairs. Issues such as mould and it being superficially treated rather than properly addressed, as well as landlords being slow or reluctant to fix problems were common complaints. Additionally, some students expressed a fear of retaliation, such as eviction or penalties, which often prevented them from reporting necessary repairs.



Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2	11	14	22	9
3%	19%	24%	38%	16%

2. Rental Properties Having Good Facilities

Opinions were divided on whether rental properties in Reading have good facilities such as bathrooms, kitchens, and heating systems. The survey results showed that a total of 38% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that properties had good facilities, while an equal percentage disagreed or strongly disagreed. The focus groups echoed these mixed views, with participants highlighting issues like poor-quality equipment and facilities. Many students reported that cleaning was not done adequately before moving in, but they were often charged for cleaning or repairs at the end of the tenancy even if they had hired professional cleaners themselves. These findings suggest variability in the quality of facilities across different rental properties in Reading.

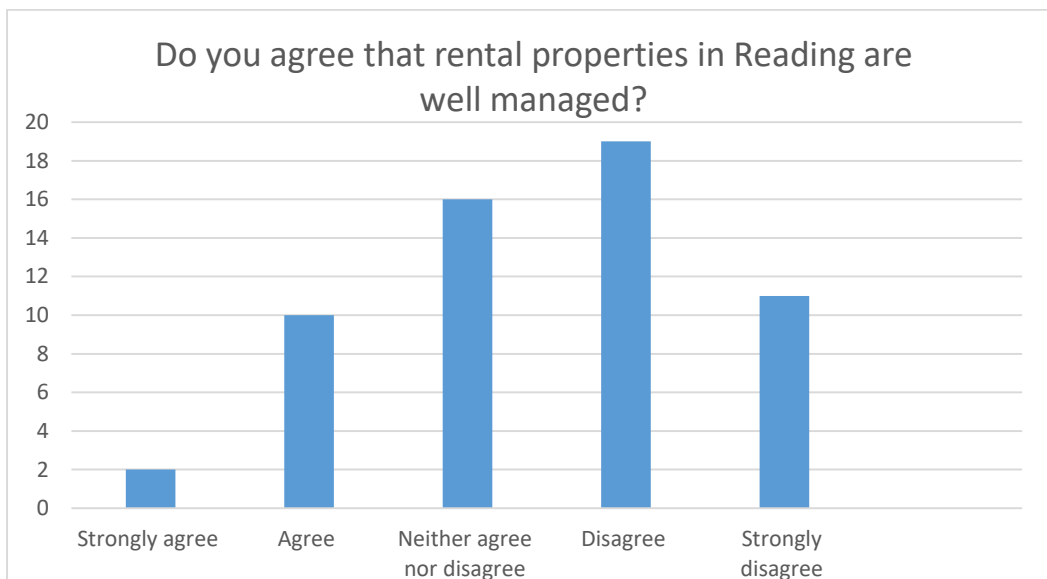


Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4	14	18	17	5

7%	24%	31%	29%	9%
----	-----	-----	-----	----

3. Rental Properties Being Well Managed

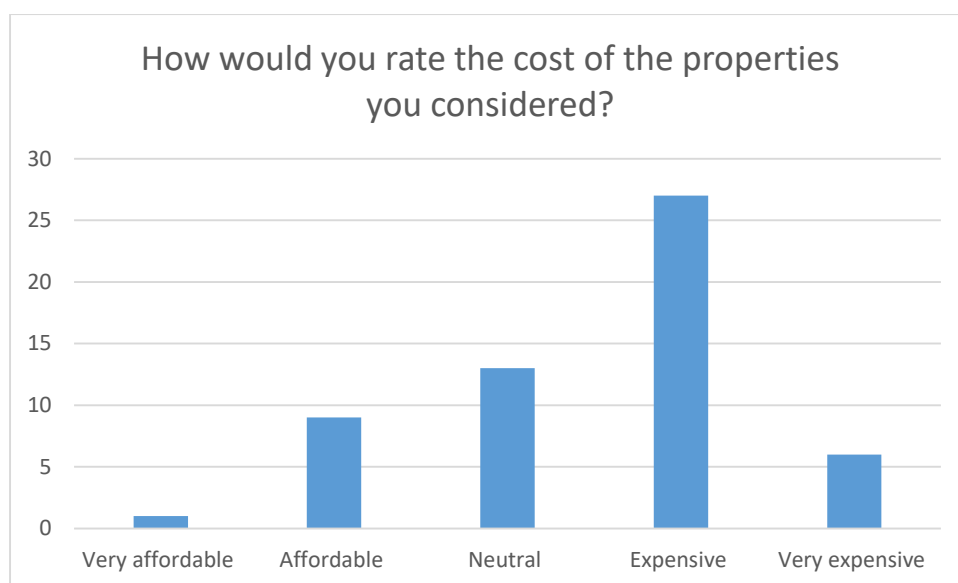
Management of rental properties in Reading appears to be another area of concern. According to the survey, 52% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that rental properties are well managed, with only 20% expressing satisfaction. This sentiment was strongly reflected in the focus groups, where students expressed frustration with landlords and property managers. Many reported that landlords and agents often delayed addressing issues or avoided them altogether, exploiting the students' inexperience with renting. The lack of proper communication and responsiveness from property managers was a recurrent theme, leading to general dissatisfaction with property management practices.



Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2	10	16	19	11
3%	17%	28%	33%	19%

4. Rating of Property Costs

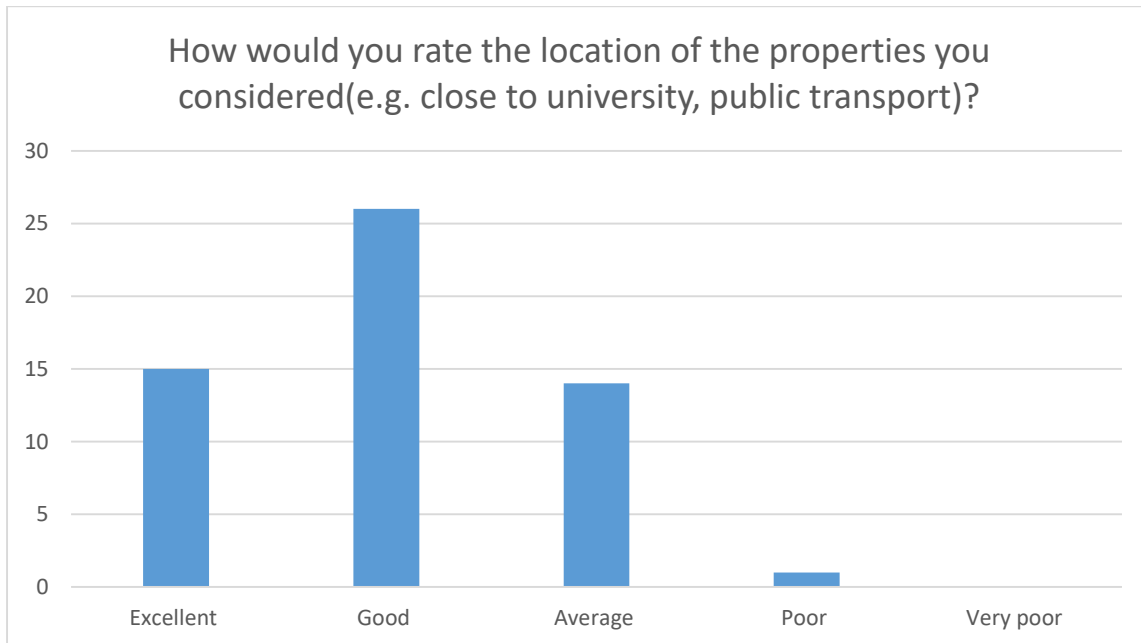
The survey results indicated that the cost of rental properties is a major concern for tenants in Reading. Nearly 60% of respondents rated the properties they considered as either expensive or very expensive, while only 18% found them affordable. This aligns with the focus group discussions, where students highlighted the financial strain of high rents, which often consumed their entire student finance. Participants also noted that the cost of rent in Reading has become comparable to parts of London, making it particularly challenging for students, especially those from lower-income backgrounds. The high cost of rent was seen as a significant barrier to finding suitable housing in the area.



Very affordable	Affordable	Neutral	Expensive	Very expensive
1	9	13	27	6
2%	16%	23%	48%	11%

5. Rating of Property Locations

Despite the concerns about cost and property conditions, the location of rental properties was generally viewed favourably. In the survey, 73% of respondents rated the locations of the properties they considered as either excellent or good, with only 2% rating them as poor. However, focus group participants noted that while the location might be good, the lack of affordable and suitable housing closer to the university often forced them to live further away. This resulted in longer commutes and additional transportation costs, adding to the overall financial burden of living in Reading.

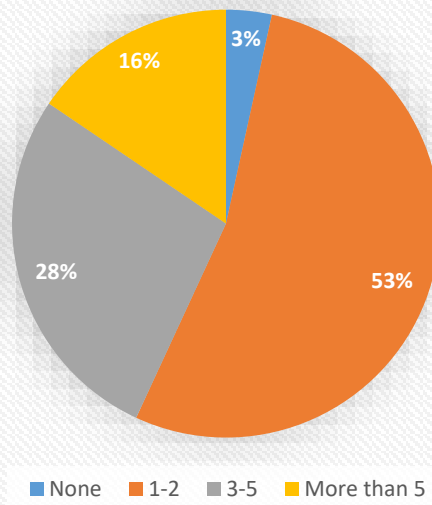


Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
15	26	14	1	0
27%	46%	25%	2%	0%

6. Number of Suitable Properties Found During Search

The availability of suitable properties is another area where students faced challenges. The survey results showed that over half of the respondents (53%) found only 1-2 suitable properties during their search, indicating limited availability of appropriate housing options. This finding was corroborated by the focus groups, where students reported that they often had to view numerous properties before finding one that was suitable. The high demand and quick turnover of properties often led to bidding wars, making the search process even more stressful and competitive.

How many Suitable properties did you find during your search?



None	1-2	3-5	More than 5
2	31	16	9
3%	53%	28%	16%

7. Landlord Type

The survey revealed that the vast majority of respondents (93%) identified themselves as tenants, reflecting the dominant student demographic of the survey and focus groups. The focus group discussions focused heavily on the experiences of student tenants, providing deeper insights into the challenges they face, such as dealing with guarantor requirements, financial pressures, and the complexities of renting in a competitive market.



Reading Borough Council	A housing association/registered social landlord	A private landlord	Other
1	6	49	3
2%	10%	83%	5%

8. Satisfaction with Response to Complaints

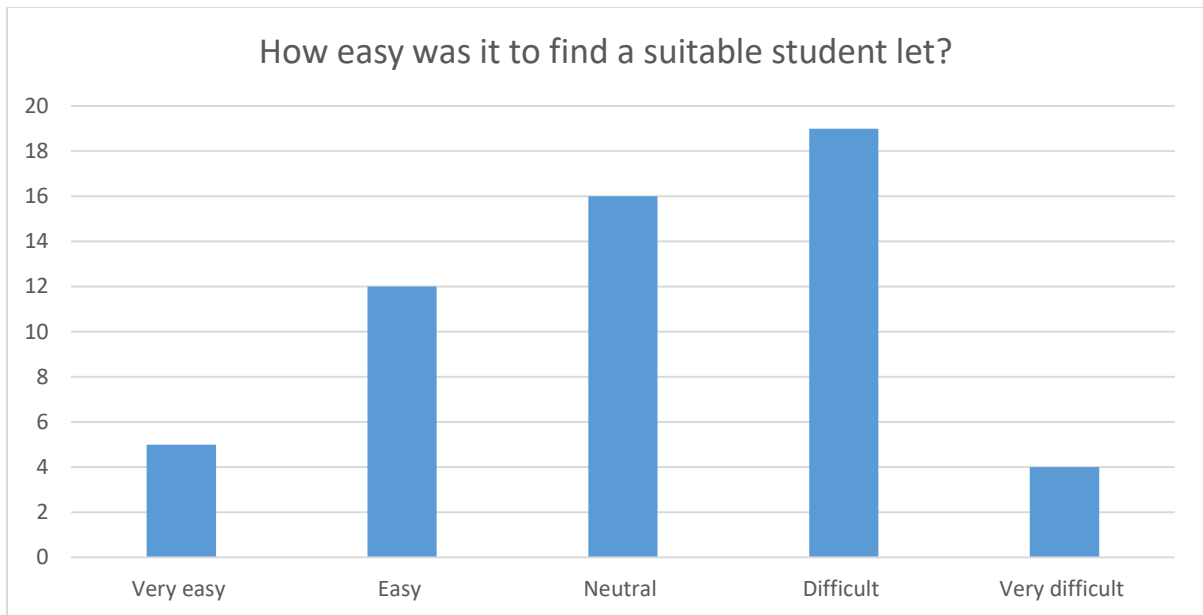
Satisfaction with the response to complaints was generally low among respondents. According to the survey, 45% of respondents were dissatisfied to some extent with how their complaints were handled, with only 23% expressing satisfaction. Focus group participants echoed these sentiments, expressing frustration with the long wait times for repairs and the lack of accountability from landlords. Students felt that their complaints were not taken seriously or were unfairly dismissed, leading to a lack of trust in the property management process.



Tenant	Landlord	Managing agent	Letting agent	Owner occupier	Other
23	10	0	0	9	2
52%	23%	0%	0%	20%	5%

9. Ease of Finding a Suitable Student Let

Finding a suitable student let was a significant challenge for many participants. The survey results indicated that 41% of respondents found it difficult or very difficult to find a suitable let, compared to 30% who found it easy or very easy. This difficulty was a common theme in the focus groups, where students reported that the process of finding suitable accommodation was often stressful and time-consuming. The competition for properties, the need to start searching early, and the pressure to make quick decisions were all factors that contributed to this challenge.



Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult
5	12	16	19	4
9%	21%	29%	34%	7%

10. Issues Encountered in Accommodation

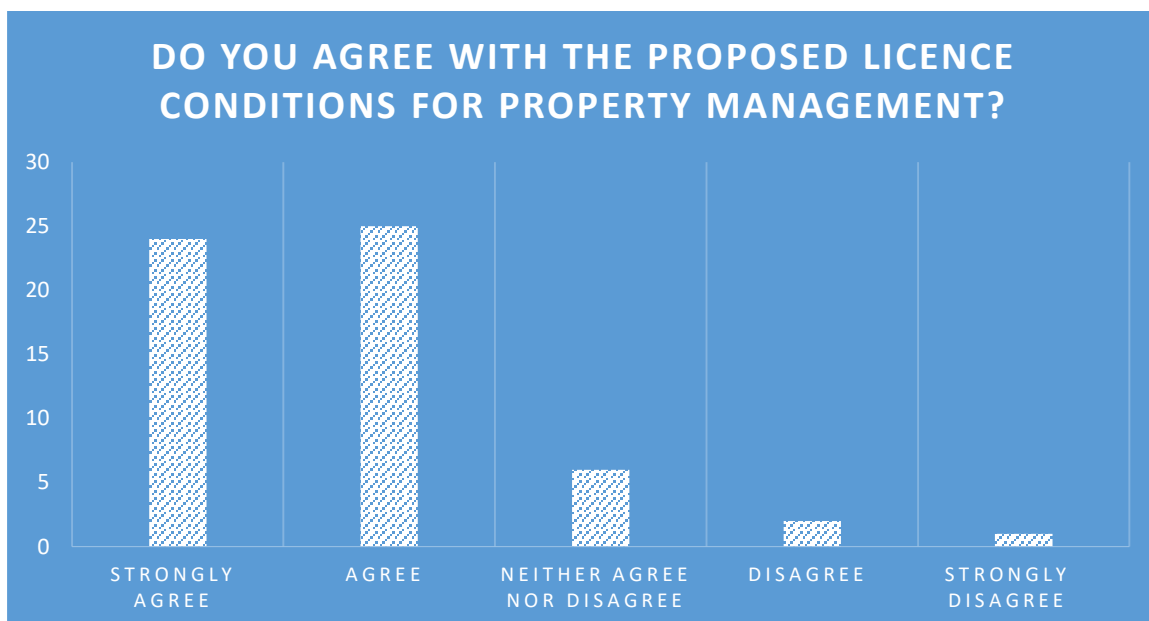
When asked about the issues they encountered in their accommodation, respondents highlighted several common problems. Overcrowding, damp, and mould were the most frequently reported issues, followed by a lack of waste bins and insufficient information on how to report problems. These issues were also prominent in the focus group discussions, where students shared their experiences of living in substandard conditions. The lack of adequate facilities and the challenges in reporting and resolving issues were major concerns for many participants.



Analysis of Responses to Licensing Questions

11. Proposed Licence Conditions for Property Management

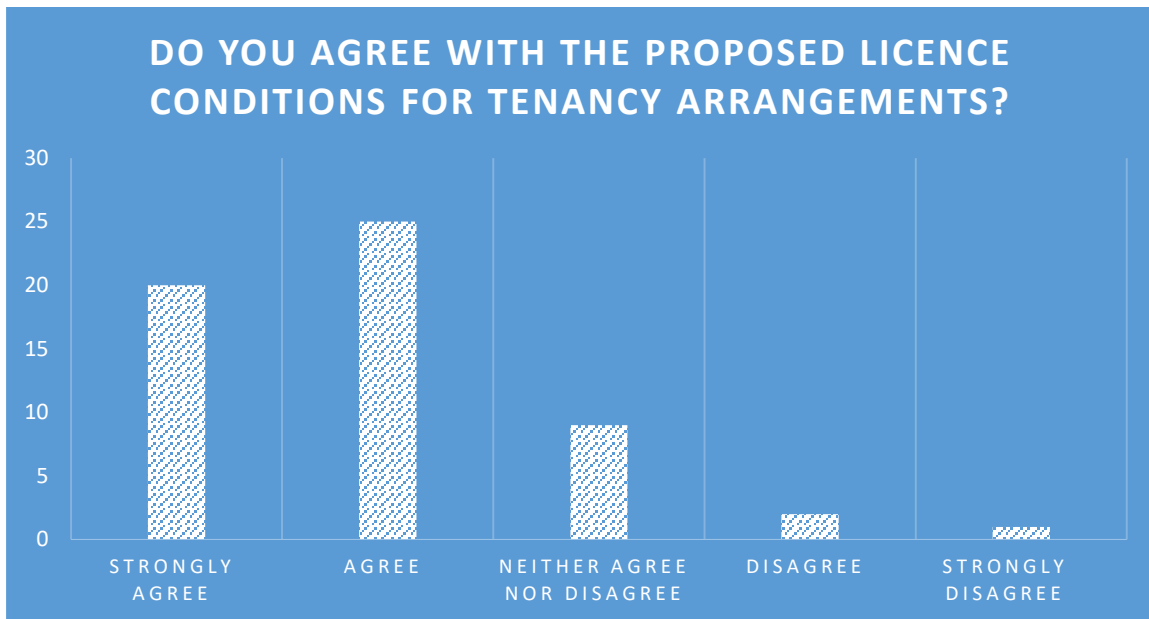
The proposed licence conditions for property management received strong support from survey respondents, with 84% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposal. Focus group participants also generally supported these conditions, seeing them as a way to hold landlords more accountable and improve the management of rental properties. However, there was concern that landlords might respond by increasing rent, which could exacerbate affordability issues for students.



Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
24	25	6	2	1
41%	43%	10%	3%	2%

12. Proposed Licence Conditions for Tenancy Arrangements

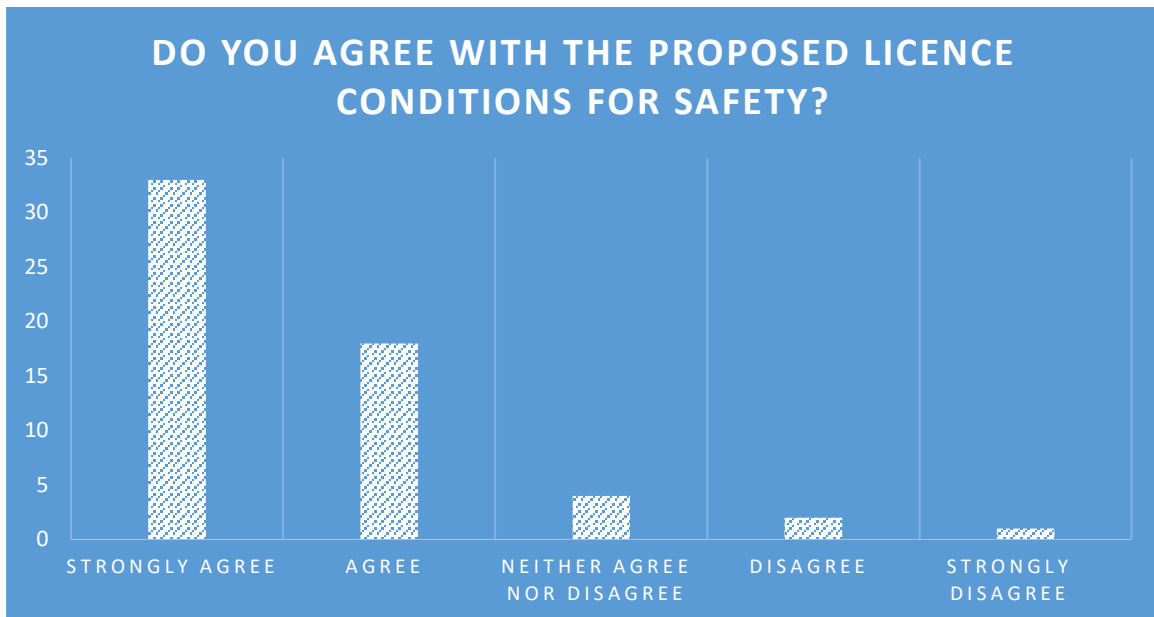
Support for the proposed licence conditions for tenancy arrangements was similarly strong, with 79% of survey respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposal. Focus group discussions revealed that students were generally supportive of these conditions, particularly because they could offer more protection in rental agreements. However, there was a need for clearer communication to ensure that all tenants understand these conditions and their implications.



Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
20	25	9	2	1
35%	44%	16%	4%	2%

13. Proposed Licence Conditions for Safety

The proposed licence conditions for safety were met with overwhelming support, with 88% of survey respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposal. Safety was a key concern in the focus groups as well, and participants supported the proposed conditions as a means to improve living conditions. However, they emphasized the need for frequent inspections to ensure that safety standards are actually being met.

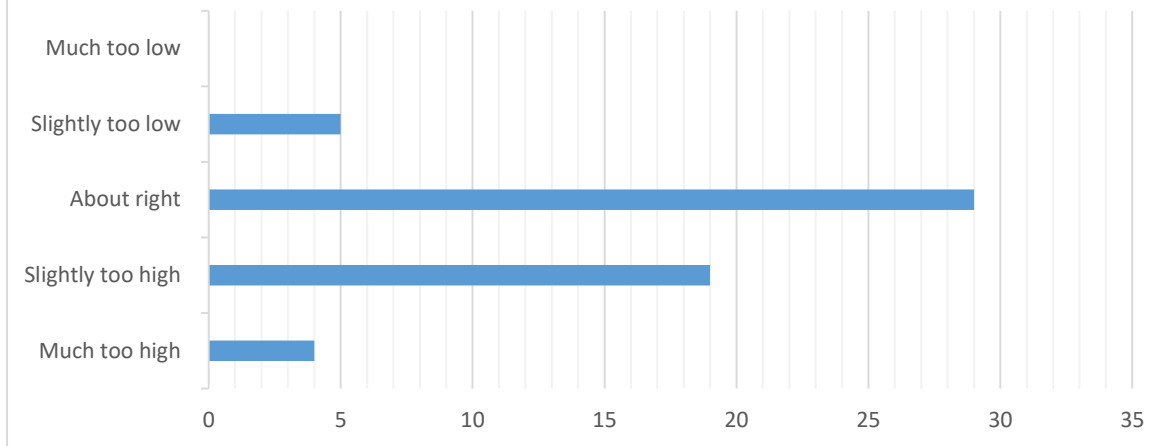


Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
33	18	4	2	1
57%	31%	7%	3%	2%

14. Proposed Late Fee

Opinions on the proposed late fee were more mixed, with 51% of survey respondents finding the fee appropriate, while 40% felt it was too high. In the focus groups, students expressed concern that such fees could add to their financial burdens, particularly if they are already struggling to pay rent and other living costs. There was also concern that landlords might exploit these fees as an additional revenue stream.

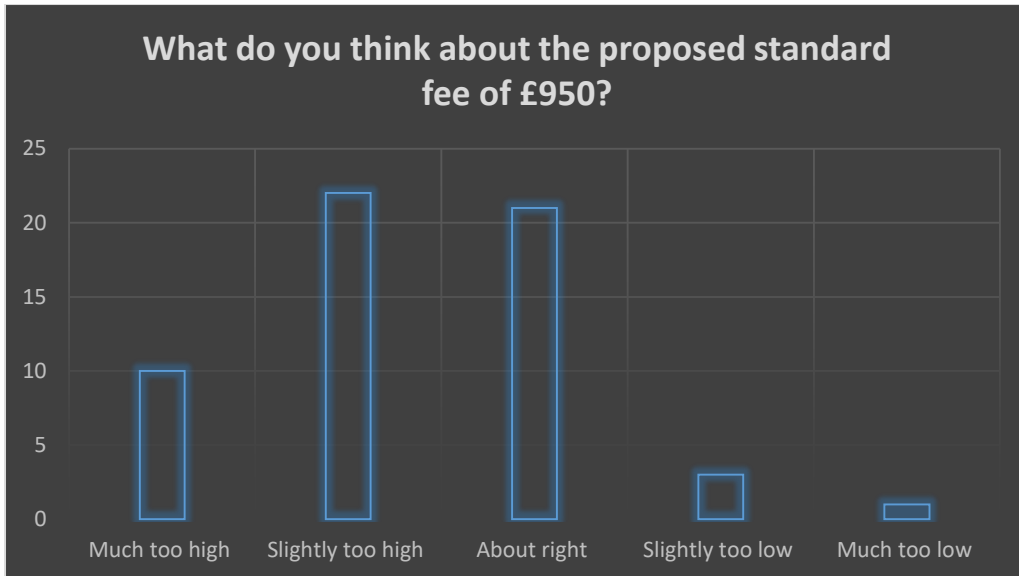
What do you think about the proposed late fee?



Much too high	Slightly too high	About right	Slightly too low	Much too low
4	19	29	5	0
7%	33%	51%	9%	0%

15. Proposed Standard Fee of £950

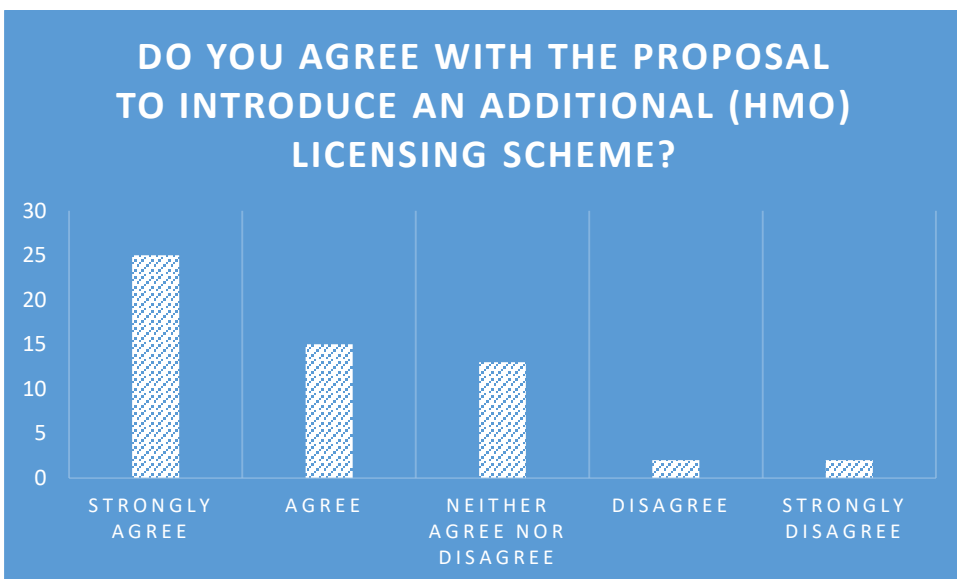
Survey respondents were divided on the proposed standard fee of £950, with 57% considering it too high and 37% finding it fair. Focus group participants shared similar concerns, particularly about the potential for such fees to be passed on to tenants, leading to higher rents and making it even more difficult for students to afford housing.



Much too high	Slightly too high	About right	Slightly too low	Much too low
10	22	21	3	1
18%	39%	37%	5%	2%

16. Introduction of an Additional (HMO) Licensing Scheme

The introduction of an additional HMO licensing scheme received support from 70% of survey respondents. The focus groups revealed that students were generally supportive of the additional licensing scheme, provided it leads to real improvements in housing conditions. However, there were concerns about the potential for rent increases as a result of the additional costs to landlords.



Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
25	15	13	2	2
44%	26%	23%	4%	4%

Conclusion

The findings from this research highlight significant concerns among students in Reading regarding the condition, management, and cost of rental properties. While there is strong support for proposed licensing conditions aimed at improving property management, tenancy arrangements, and safety, there are also concerns about the potential financial impact on tenants. Addressing these issues and ensuring clear communication with tenants will be crucial in improving the rental experience for students in Reading.