

First-Time Buyer's Complete Checklist

Ethical Conveyancing — ethicalconveyancing.co.uk

Stage 1 — Get your finances in order

- Check your credit report (Experian, Equifax or TransUnion) and fix any errors
- Work out your maximum budget including deposit, solicitor fees, survey and stamp duty
- Get an Agreement in Principle (AIP) from a mortgage broker or lender
- Check if you're eligible for any first-time buyer schemes (e.g. Lifetime ISA, Shared Ownership)
- Confirm your deposit is accessible and in a UK bank account ready to transfer

Stage 2 — Search for your property

- List your must-haves vs nice-to-haves (bedrooms, garden, parking, transport links, schools)
- Register with estate agents in your target area and set up alerts on Rightmove/Zoopla
- Research sold prices on recent comparable properties before making offers
- Check whether the property is freehold or leasehold (and if leasehold, check lease length and service charges)
- View the property at least twice, including once at a different time of day

Stage 3 — Making an offer

- Make your offer in writing (email) and confirm you are a first-time buyer with AIP in place
- Ask the seller how quickly they want to move — align timescales where possible
- Clarify what fixtures and fittings are included in the sale

Stage 4 — Offer accepted — instruct your team

- Instruct a conveyancing solicitor as soon as your offer is accepted
- Submit your full mortgage application with all required documents (payslips, bank statements, ID)
- Book your property survey (Level 2 HomeBuyer Report recommended for most properties; Level 3 for older or unusual buildings)
- Complete your ID and anti-money laundering (AML) checks with your solicitor promptly
- Pay for your searches when requested (local authority, water, drainage, environmental)

Stage 5 — During the legal process

- Read and respond to all documents your solicitor sends — don't let them pile up

- Review the draft contract and raise any questions with your solicitor
- Review your mortgage offer carefully when it arrives — check the term, rate and monthly payments
- Ask your solicitor about any issues flagged in the searches or survey
- Reply quickly to any requests for information — delays from buyers are the most common cause of slow transactions

Stage 6 — Approaching exchange

- Confirm your deposit funds are in your solicitor's account or ready to transfer on exchange day
- Agree your completion date with the seller before exchange
- Arrange buildings insurance to start from the date of exchange
- Book your removals company well in advance of your agreed completion date
- Sign and return the contract to your solicitor ready for exchange

Stage 7 — Completion day

- Transfer any remaining funds to your solicitor the day before completion
- Wait for your solicitor to confirm that completion has taken place before collecting keys
- Collect keys from the estate agent once your solicitor has confirmed funds received
- Take meter readings for gas, electricity and water as soon as you get in
- Change the locks — you don't know how many copies of the old keys exist

Stage 8 — After you move in

- Redirect your post (Royal Mail redirection service)
- Update your address with HMRC, DVLA, your bank, employer, GP and dentist
- Register on the electoral roll at your new address
- Set up your council tax, broadband, and utility accounts
- Store your title deeds, mortgage offer and completion statement safely