

First steps

A pre-departure guide for international students
coming to study in the UK 2011–12



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A very warm welcome

Every year, the UK welcomes thousands of students from all over the world. Perhaps like you, they come here to experience the fantastic opportunities a UK education can offer, and the amazing social and cultural mix you can enjoy while living here.

This guide is designed to help you get ready for what we hope will be the experience of a lifetime, and it's packed with useful and important information. There's a lot to take in, so please take the time to read it carefully.

In its pages, you'll find everything you need to know, and what to do, before you leave home, as well as advice about your arrival in the UK, settling in, getting organised, and making the most of your new student life.

It includes information about immigration, fees and finances, preparing for your journey, travelling, the weather, the clothing you'll need, looking after yourself, studying, shopping, enjoying yourself and more.

We've also provided a list of useful contacts (page 31) and a web address where you can download further guidance if you need it (page 33). So welcome to the UK. We look forward to seeing you.





Preparing for your journey

Being well prepared for your journey makes life a lot easier. With this in mind, make sure you've got everything organised with plenty of time to spare before you leave home. Your place of study should have sent you information. Read it all very carefully, it will help you with your pre-departure preparations. You should also have been provided with a 24-hour telephone number and the name of someone you can contact if you have any problems on your journey, or if you arrive later than planned. You should plan your journey from your point of entry into the UK to your final destination, and know when and where you are supposed to arrive.

If you do not have the above information, contact your place of study as soon as possible so that you can be fully prepared for your journey. You may also want to look up your place of study on the internet before you leave.

Many institutions offer a 'meet and greet' airport collection service for your arrival in the UK. If you want to use this service you will need to book it in advance.

It is important you arrive in time for your institution's welcome or orientation week. This is a part of the institution's overall welcome and helps international students settle into life in the UK. Usually the International Office or National Union of Students (NUS)

runs a **welcome International** or Orientation programme in September each year. The programme will provide you with dedicated local support and information to help you to settle more quickly. This includes support with opening a bank account, registering with the police, registering with a doctor or dentist, details about local shops and other useful information.

Visit Britain may have an office in your country – consult their website at www.visitbritain.co.uk. They will be able to give you help and advice on planning your journey.

Make sure you have your student entry clearance before you travel to the UK. It is assumed that you will be arriving at an airport in the UK, although other methods of transport are detailed in the 'Arrival in the UK' section on page 14. If you will be studying in or near to London, you may wish to book your flight into Heathrow, Gatwick, Luton, Stanstead or London City Airport.

If you are studying elsewhere in the UK, you should book a direct flight to one of the 28 smaller regional airports, or book a connecting flight from a European airport or one of the London airports.

To check information about airports, visit: www.baa.com
British Airport Authority.



Documents required for your journey

Certain documents are needed when you arrive at the airport in the UK, where you will be interviewed by immigration and health officials. It is therefore important that you bring with you:

- a valid passport, with a visa or UK entry clearance (if applicable)
- an air ticket
- vaccination certificates, if required
- an X-ray report, if required
- a letter of acceptance from your place of study (Tier 4) or work (Tier 5)
- documentary evidence that you have enough money to pay your tuition fees and accommodate yourself while studying (recent bank statements, proof of scholarship or sponsor's letter)
- originals (or certified true copies) of any degree certificates or technical qualifications.

Make sure you keep the above documents and the following in your hand luggage:

- some warm clothing
- some British currency
- insurance documents
- a list of what you are carrying in your luggage in case you have to make an insurance claim
- any prescribed drugs or medicine you are taking, plus a letter from your doctor explaining what they are
- an address, telephone number and travel instructions to your final destination
- the First steps pre-departure pack
- a reference letter from your bank in your own country – this will be useful when you come to open a bank account in the UK.

Money

You need to order British currency and travellers' cheques and bring enough money to cover your immediate needs on your arrival in the UK, including customs charges, rail fares and any emergency expenses. About £250 should be enough, but if you have any family with you, you will need correspondingly more. If you are travelling to the UK from a country outside the EU and carrying more than 10,000 euros you will need to declare this to customs.

It is also likely that you will have to pay a deposit for your accommodation before you move in. This is normally the equivalent of one month's rent but it can be substantially more, depending on the type of accommodation you are renting. You will need to ensure that you have sufficient funds immediately available to cover this.

To check the banknotes used in the UK and for further information go to:

www.bankofengland.co.uk.

See also 'Banks and money' on page 25.

Transfer of funds

If you are planning to transfer extra money to the UK you should arrange this before you leave your home country.

Also before you leave home, check whether you need permission to transfer money to the UK and whether your government has restrictions on the amount of money you can take out of your country. Opening a bank account in the UK can take a few weeks.



Clothing and other items

You should have enough warm clothing for your flight and subsequent journey. Several layers of lightweight clothes are better than a single shirt or dress. It is probably cheaper and easier to buy warm winter clothing in the UK, rather than in your home country.

It is worth bringing items of your national dress to wear at social events, and photographs of family and home may be of interest to new friends who would like to learn about other cultures.

It is useful to bring some passport-sized photographs of yourself.

See also 'Climate and clothing' on page 26.

Luggage

You will have a free baggage allowance, which will be shown on your air ticket; this is usually from 20kg with a restricted weight of 32kg per single item of luggage. Only essential personal possessions may be brought in addition to research materials. You may be charged for excess baggage if you exceed the baggage allowance, so check with the airline before you leave if you are not sure of your allowance. You should make a list of everything you bring.

Advice on importing personal effects and goods into the UK may be obtained from HM Revenue and Customs (www.hmrc.gov.uk).

Insurance

You should always take out travel insurance covering your journey to the UK. This should cover delays, medical emergencies and the cost of replacing any belongings if they are lost on your journey. If you are coming to the UK for less than six months you should also take out travel and medical insurance for the duration of your stay.

Endsleigh and Saxon specialise in insurance for students:

www.endsleigh.co.uk

www.saxoninsurance.com

Personal security

The UK is generally a safe place to be, but as with anywhere – especially if you're new to it – it pays to take a few common sense precautions

For example, always carry your money in an inside pocket, not in your back pocket or the outer pockets of coats or jackets. If you want to leave your coat or jacket anywhere, then take your money with you. And if you carry a handbag, keep it by you and don't leave it unattended, even for short periods.

Don't carry large amounts of cash with you – just enough to meet your day-to-day needs. Order travellers' cheques in small denominations – £5, £10 and £20 – and remember to keep a note of their serial numbers in case you lose them.



Avoid leaving luggage, bags or briefcases in waiting rooms, on railway platforms or on luggage racks where you can't see them. It's much safer to carry valuables like cameras, radios and computers with you, and again, make a note of their serial numbers.

Take care of your mobile phone and try to avoid using it in crowded places or when you're walking along busy streets. If your phone is stolen, report it (and give your number) to the network operator and the police – to minimise the chance of thieves using it.

Finally, take especial care of your passport, tickets and other personal documents. For further tips read the Creating confidence booklet (International students) or the Safety first booklet (Tier 5) – making sure that your time in the UK is safe and enjoyable.

Preparations for your course

Some courses require you to write a dissertation or seminar papers. If you are on such a course you should bring with you important documents relating to your own country, which may not be available in the UK.

If you want to bring items of high value such as a computer or audio equipment, you should also bring receipts showing when and where they were purchased. British customs officials may ask you to certify that the equipment is for your own use and that you are not importing it permanently.

Checklist for your place of study

Once your preparations for arrival are complete, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you checked if you are able to book an airport collection and have you booked it?
- Have you received information on how to get to your place of study from the airport, and how much it will cost?
- Do you know exactly when and where you are supposed to arrive at your place of study?
- Have you told your place of study when you are likely to arrive?
- Do you have a 24-hour telephone number for someone you can contact at your place of study, in case you have problems on your journey?
- Do you have a contact when you arrive at your place of study or other meeting point, e.g. the railway station?
- Have you planned your journey from your point of entry into the UK to your final destination?



Checklist for your journey

Once your preparations for arrival are complete, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you bought travel tickets (including connecting flight to regional airports, if required) and travel insurance?
- Have you made all the necessary arrangements for family members that are coming with you?
- Have you obtained a letter from your doctor for any prescribed drugs you may need to bring with you?
- Have you ordered British currency and travellers' cheques for your immediate arrival expenses?
- Have you checked whether you need permission to transfer money to the UK?
- Have you checked whether your own government has restrictions on the amount of money you can take out of your country?
- Have you read the Creating confidence or Safety first booklets?
- Have you taken out personal possessions and medical insurance?
- Have you checked with your local British Mission what you must declare at customs and what you are not allowed to bring into the UK?
www.direct.gov.uk/foodimports
- Have you weighed your baggage to ensure that it is within your baggage allowance and is easily transportable for your onward journey?



Arrival in the UK

If you are travelling by sea you will probably arrive at one of the UK ports – Dover, Folkestone, Harwich, Hull, Portsmouth or Southampton – from where you can travel to your final destination in the UK. These major ports have many onward coach and rail connections.

You can also arrive in London on the Eurostar train using the Channel Tunnel. Rail services throughout Europe connect in Paris and Brussels with the Eurostar service and, on arrival in London, connections can be made by rail throughout the UK from one of the main London stations. You may need to travel into central London in order to catch a train or coach to your final destination.

There are excellent connections to UK regional airports through European airports such as Amsterdam, Paris or Frankfurt.

However, most international students travel by air and your first sight of the UK is likely to be an airport. If you are travelling by air you will usually arrive at Gatwick, Heathrow, London City, Luton or Stansted airports, all of which are convenient if you are studying in London or the south-east of England.

If, like many international students, you are studying elsewhere, there are many international regional airports located throughout the UK, and your journey is likely to be much easier if you fly to the regional airport closest to your place of study. Many intercontinental flights now serve UK airports such as Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Manchester; direct and onward connections are available from these, as well as from the London airports, to destinations throughout the UK.

There are also excellent connections to UK regional airports through European airports such as Amsterdam, Paris or Frankfurt.

Through Europe you can reach several UK regional airports, such as Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool, Norwich and Southampton, that are not connected to the major London airports.

If you pass through another European airport check beforehand whether you require a 'transit visa', which will normally give you a fixed number of hours or days after arrival in which to complete your onward journey. Certain nationalities require a 'direct airside transit visa' even to transit to another flight within the airport, which means that you cannot leave the airport under any circumstances. Certain other nationalities can 'transit without visa' provided that the transfer is within the same airport, and you remain within the airport to take an onward flight.

If your air journey involves a connection, whether in Europe or in the UK, ask the airline staff to check you and your baggage through to your final destination, as this will make your transit through the connection airport much easier.

At first sight an airport can appear a difficult and confusing place, but if you follow the steps below, getting through it is actually quite easy.

These are the steps you must take:

- Follow the sign for 'Arrivals' unless you are transferring to another plane at the same airport. If you are transferring to another plane, follow the 'Flight connections' sign and any further instructions.
- 'Arrivals' will take you to passport control.
- As you approach passport control you will see electronic screens; these will show you which zone you will need to go through. Make sure you join the right queue or you could waste a lot of time.
- All passengers must go through the immigration zone dealing with their flight. Note that there is one zone for passengers who have UK, EEA or Swiss national passports and one or more zones for all other passport holders.

- The immigration officer will want to see: that your passport is up-to-date, that your documents are in order, your landing card from the plane, and, if required, a valid visa.
- If you do not require prior entry clearance or a visa, you will also need to show a letter of acceptance as a student from a UK institution and proof that you are able to pay for your course and living expenses without working in the UK, for example, bank statements for the last three months and/or a sponsor's letter.
- If you are bringing family to live with you in the UK, and they are not EEA nationals, they must have obtained entry clearance from a British Mission before travelling to the UK.
- The immigration officer needs to be satisfied that you meet the immigration rules for students and that you intend to leave the UK at the end of your studies.
- Another part of the immigration process is health control: you might be asked to undergo a brief, routine health check by the airport doctor, which may include an X-ray as part of a short medical examination. The health check will take place in a separate room. Afterwards you will have to return to immigration control.
- As long as your documents are in order, you should pass through immigration smoothly. But if you find you need any help for any reason, there are two things you can do:
 - 1 Ask the immigration officer to telephone your college or university (keep the telephone number with you).

- 2 Ask to see a representative of the Immigration Advisory Service. The service has offices at most major airports and seaports, and can also be reached on the following numbers:

<u>Central Officer</u>	<u>020 7357 6917</u>
<u>Helpline</u>	<u>020 7378 9191</u>
<u>Detention freephone (free call)</u>	<u>0800 435427</u>
<u>From Birmingham airport</u>	<u>706 9765</u>
<u>From Dover East (seaport)</u>	<u>240 1224</u>
<u>From Dover West (seaport)</u>	<u>240 2461</u>
<u>From Gatwick airport</u>	<u>533385</u>
<u>From Heathrow airport</u>	<u>020 8814 1559</u>
<u>From Manchester airport</u>	<u>834 9942</u>
<u>For all Scottish airports</u>	<u>0870 606 7766</u>

If you have travelled by Eurostar train through the Channel Tunnel your passport and documents will be checked on the train, and you may be asked further questions when you arrive in London. If you are driving you will pass through UK immigration at the terminal in France before taking your car on to the shuttle train.



Police registration

Your passport or identity card will state whether or not you have to register with the Overseas Visitors Records Office (180 Borough High Street, London SE1 1LK, telephone +(44) (0)20 7230 1600, Monday to Friday, 0900 to 1630) or, if you are outside London, at a major police station close to where you will be living. If you are required to register with the police, you must do so within seven days of your arrival in the UK. Your entry clearance stamp will probably tell you to register with the police. If your entry clearance tells you to register, your husband/wife and/or child are likely to be given an entry clearance or stamp that tells them to register too.

When registering you will be charged a registration fee (currently £34), and must take your passport and two photographs of yourself (unless you are registering in London, in which case only one photograph is required). Your student adviser at your place of study will explain, if necessary, how to register.

Each time you change your address, status, or extend your permission to be in the UK you must renew your police registration. There is no charge unless you have lost your original registration document.

EEA nationals and Commonwealth citizens do not have to register.

** The countries of the EEA are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.*

Customs control

Once you are clear of passport control you can proceed to the baggage reclaim area, where you can collect your luggage. Above each baggage carousel is an electronic display unit. Find the one that shows your flight number, as this will be the carousel that has your luggage on it. If any item of your luggage does not appear, find a representative of the airline on which you travelled and fill in a lost-luggage form.

At UK airports there are normally three exits through customs – a green channel if you are travelling from outside the European Union and have nothing to declare; a red channel if you are travelling from outside the European Union and have goods to declare; and a blue channel if you are travelling from an airport within the European Economic Area, where your luggage has already been cleared through customs control.

The notices in the customs areas will tell you if you need to declare anything you have brought into the country. If in doubt, check with one of the customs officers before passing through customs control.

Even if you pass through the green channel, the customs officers may ask you to open your luggage for checking.

For advice on importing personal effects and goods into the UK, you can check with HM Revenue and Customs (see Useful organisations, page 31).

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) have a website – www.defra.gov.uk – that gives information on illegal importation of foods and plants, to prevent animal and plant pests and diseases from coming into the UK.

When you have come through customs, you will have completed all the formalities and will have officially arrived in the UK.



Onward travel: how to get from the airport to your final destination

Travelling on the Underground is generally the quickest way to get around London and is one of the best ways to get to London's mainline stations for trains to take you to your place of study.

Onward travel

You should receive instructions from your place of study on how to get there before you leave. If you are studying in London or the south-east, you will probably want to arrive in the UK at one of the three major London airports: Gatwick, Heathrow or Stansted. If you are studying elsewhere in the UK, you should check for flights to the nearest airport. There are many other airports throughout the UK, most of which have excellent connections through Amsterdam, Brussels, Frankfurt, London or Paris.

For information about Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Southampton airports check out the British Airport Authority website at:

www.baa.co.uk.

There are also increasing numbers of direct flights to the larger non-London airports such as Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow,

Manchester and Newcastle. You can check out the institution's website for onward travel details and Visit Britain should be able to provide travel information if they are contacted well ahead of time:

www.visitbritain.com.

If you have not already arranged onward travel from the airport, the general information desk at the airport will advise you on the best way to travel to your destination. There are also commercial information desks where you can find information about onward travel.

Some places of study send a staff member to meet new international students at the airport or local train station. If they offer this service they should have sent details of it in your information pack.

You may need to use a telephone to contact your place of study.





Telephone

Public telephones or 'payphones' are available in the UK. They operate either with cash or a phonecard (which you can buy from post offices and some shops), or with a credit card. If necessary, you can contact the operator by dialling 100 (155 for the international operator).

To access the directory enquiries service for information about telephone numbers, dial 118 500 for UK numbers, or 118 505 for international numbers.

Mobile phones can be more expensive to use than landlines, although if you choose your tariff and service provider in the UK carefully (most contracts will give you free minutes and text messages), then this might not be the case.

Useful numbers

<u>UK Directory Enquiries</u>	118 500
<u>International Directory Enquiries</u>	118 505
<u>UK Operator</u>	100
<u>International Operator</u>	155
<u>Emergencies</u>	999

Checklist for onward travel

Once your preparations for arrival are complete, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you got instructions on how to get to your place of study?
- Have you checked out your place of study on the internet?
- Have you seen a map of the UK and the location of your first place of study?
- Do you know the length of time of any onward journey from the airport?
- Do you know about the information desks at the airport?
- Do you know how to use public transport, e.g. the Underground, buses and trains?
- Have you arranged accommodation if you need to stay overnight in London?
- Have you made sure you obtained a receipt for your deposit that includes the date, the amount paid and the words 'deposit for accommodation'?



Settling in

Accommodation

It's always best to arrange accommodation in the UK before you leave home, but if for any reason you haven't been able to do this, here is some practical advice.

Think carefully about your needs. For example, how close is the accommodation to your place of study? Is there good public transport? How much will it cost? Are you near shops and facilities? How big is your room? How secure is it? Will you have enough quiet and privacy for study? And so on.

Then start by going to the accommodation office at your place of study, where they will be able to advise you on all of this and more.

To have the best chance of securing accommodation at your place of study you must:

- apply as soon as you can
- fully complete any accommodation forms and return them before the deadline date
- confirm your accommodation arrangements with the accommodation office at your place of study before you arrive in the UK
- be prepared to have to pay for accommodation in advance, if necessary
- not bring any family with you unless you have booked accommodation for them in advance.

Where it is not possible to book accommodation in advance, you will be asked to meet the accommodation officer at your place of study, who should be able to help you find permanent accommodation.

University/college accommodation

Most universities and colleges have their own accommodation office and this should be the first place you go to ask about accommodation. Most institutions provide accommodation for single and unaccompanied married international students in a hall of residence (either full-board or self-catering) or a self-catering shared house or flat. Space is usually limited, so applications for such accommodation should be made as soon as you have been accepted on your course and certainly before the required deadline.


Private accommodation

The accommodation office at your institution may be able to help with this too. The office may keep lists of private accommodation available in the area, and some offices may even help you arrange a booking.

The most usual type of private accommodation is a room in a house, sharing facilities. Renting a furnished house or a flat is likely to be expensive, especially in city centres, and quite difficult to find. A good way of making this affordable is to share with other students. If you do this, make sure you agree beforehand on how you will share costs.

You will have to do your own cooking and cleaning, and in some cases, will need to provide your own bed linen and cooking equipment. Ask the landlord or landlady about these things.

You may decide to stay in lodgings, as part of a family. This will give you the opportunity to speak English on a regular basis. But be sure to discuss any 'house rules' with your hosts first.



Whatever type of private accommodation you decide on, you will need to meet the owner of the property so that you can see it for yourself, and discuss the rent.

Do not sign any accommodation contract you do not understand, as contracts are legally binding. If you are unsure, take a copy of the agreement to your college accommodation officer or student welfare officer for his or her advice.

If you decide to move in, ask for a tenancy agreement that both you and the owner will sign. This will set out the agreement between you.

You will probably be asked to pay a deposit before you can move in (usually equivalent to one month's rent). This will be given back to you when you leave, provided all the bills have been paid and there is no damage to the property or its contents. Make sure you get a receipt for this.

If you rent a property from a private landlord or property management agent and you pay a deposit, they must protect your deposit in a government-authorised scheme.

You can download a useful leaflet on the tenancy deposit scheme from:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/tenancydeposit/dg_066383.

You may be asked to sign an inventory for all the items listed in the property. Get a copy of this and a receipt for all the rent payments that you make. Always ask for a rent book in which your payments can be recorded.

You may have to use a card for the electricity and gas that you use. In some situations it will make more sense to share bills for lighting and heating with other tenants, but make sure you agree beforehand on how the costs are to be shared.

You should not bring your family to the UK until you have found suitable accommodation for them. University accommodation is very limited and it can be extremely distressing and very expensive for a family if they have to stay in a hotel for a long time. The best thing is to travel to the UK first to arrange family accommodation. This also gives you time to consider the amount of space you need, heating costs, safety, local amenities, and so on.

Council Tax

In the UK most people over the age of 18 have to pay a charge for local community services, such as the police, fire brigade, rubbish collection and leisure services, and this is called Council Tax.

If you live in an educational institution's halls of residence, a hostel owned by a charity, or share a home with other full-time students or with your family, then you should not have to pay this tax. If you live anywhere else you may have to pay it. The exact amount will depend upon where you are living.

Your students' union or Citizens Advice Bureau can usually help with Council Tax problems (www.nacab.org.uk).

Checklist

- View the property
- Tenancy agreement
- Deposit
- Inventory
- Rent book
- Payment of bills
- Council Tax

Banks and money

Long-term students need to open a bank account as soon as possible, ideally with one of the banks on campus, or nearby. Many banks offer special facilities and schemes for students and the bank's financial advisers can help you organise your account. You will need to take your passport and the letter of acceptance from your place of study with you, together with proof of your addresses at home and in the UK, and a reference and statements from your home bank when you go to open your account.

Setting up a bank account before your arrival should avoid difficulties and delays, and Barclays are the only bank we are aware of that can activate your account before confirmation of your UK address:

www.barclays.com/studentandfamily.

Most banks in the UK are open from 0930 to 1630 Monday to Friday (some are also open on Saturday mornings). But if you have a cash card for your account you can use a cash machine at any time of the day, on any day of the week.

Scottish banks issue their own notes and all notes are legal currency throughout the UK.

Try to find out as much as you can about banking in the UK before you get here. Visit the website at www.bba.org.uk. Ask your college or university what your options are for paying fees, so you'll know what facilities you'll need. Then contact your bank in your home country and ask:

- how best to transfer your money to the UK
- about running a bank account in the UK
- whether your bank has a special relationship with any UK banks
- whether you can use cash cards from your home bank in cash machines in the UK.

It is important not to overspend on your account, as you can incur charges if your account is overdrawn. If you need to spend more money than you have in your account, then you need to talk to the bank's student adviser about arranging an overdraft:

www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk.

Medical reports

You should have a health check at least four weeks before you leave for the UK. Don't leave this to the last minute, as you won't have enough time to readjust to any medication before starting out on your journey and course of study.

You should also obtain a copy of your chest X-ray report and carry it with your offer letter, as you may have to produce this at passport control. This may avoid having to have another X-ray.

Medical costs in the UK

- If you are on a course lasting six months or more (or any course of any duration in Scotland) you can get treatment from the British National Health Service (NHS), including free doctor's examinations and hospital treatment, from the beginning of your stay. This also applies to your dependents (spouse and/or children). You should register with a doctor as an NHS patient and take your passport, proof of your UK address and the letter of enrolment from your place of study as proof of your student status.
- If you are on a course lasting less than six months you may still ask a doctor to treat you under the NHS, but they may refuse to do so, and you will not be entitled to NHS hospital treatment (except in an emergency). You should therefore take out health insurance, unless you come from an EEA country or a country with a reciprocal agreement for free health care in the UK.



- Reciprocal health care agreements are limited to hospital treatment of some NHS illnesses that arise during your visit to the UK (i.e. which did not exist before your arrival).
- You will have to pay a fixed contribution towards the costs of any medicines prescribed, some other GP services (e.g. vaccinations) and any eye treatment.
- If you are registered with the NHS you are entitled to the services of an NHS dentist, although dental treatment is not free.
- If you are ill and unable to attend your training course you must inform your academic tutor of the cause of your illness.
- To check symptoms of illness or to find your nearest doctor, optician, dentist or pharmacy you can use NHS Direct at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/en/checksymptoms/findyournearest

Climate and clothing

The UK has a temperate climate, with few extremes. But the weather here is famously changeable. So be prepared. It can be quite wet and cold in the winter, (roughly November to March). So a warm topcoat, hat, scarf, gloves and an umbrella are a good idea. It also gets dark early. Summers can occasionally be showery and overcast, but are mostly pleasant and rarely extremely hot. The days are long and it stays light until late in the evening.

Keeping healthy

The best way to stay healthy while you're in the UK is the same way to stay healthy when you're at home: eat healthy foods, exercise fairly regularly, and make sure you get enough sleep.

Eating a balanced diet (a selection of foods) can be a challenge when you first arrive – the food in the UK may be very different from what you're used to.

Try to eat, every day:

- lots of fresh fruit and vegetables
- some bread, potatoes, rice, noodles or pasta
- some protein, such as beans, lentils, eggs, fish or meat
- some milk, cheese, yogurt or soy products (e.g. soy milk, tofu).

Try to get some exercise several times a week. Most colleges and universities in the UK offer lots of opportunities to practice your favourite sport or learn a new one. If you don't like sports, try an exercise class, or go for a long walk.

Travelling to a new country with a different climate and different foods can cause small health upsets. You may develop minor illnesses such as coughs and colds. If you haven't had these symptoms before, they may seem worrying at first, but don't be alarmed – these problems are usually easy to treat and advice can be given by a pharmacist at your local chemist. You may need to make an appointment to see your doctor, and remember to explain any changes in your lifestyle that might be affecting your health.

Meningitis

When you have registered with a local doctor you should make an appointment to be immunised against meningitis. This immunisation is free of charge and provides protection against the disease for three to five years.

Meningitis is an infection that causes inflammation (swelling) of the lining of the brain and spinal cord. Although the infection is quite rare, it is extremely dangerous and can result in deafness, blindness, loss of limbs or even death. Meningitis can develop very quickly and sometimes within a matter of hours. Early symptoms of meningitis are similar to flu, such as feeling feverish or suffering from an aching back or joints, headaches and vomiting. If any of the following symptoms develop then you must get medical help urgently:

- severe aversion to light
- a rash that doesn't fade when pressure is applied (you can test this by pressing the side of a glass against the rash; if the rash doesn't fade and change colour under the pressure, contact your doctor immediately)
- disorientation
- loss of consciousness, leading to coma.

Further information is available from your college or university nurse or from the Meningitis Research Foundation, free number 080 8800 3344 or on the internet at:

www.immunisation.org.uk or www.meningitis.org

Studying

Study methods in the UK may be very different to your own. Students in the UK use a variety of textbooks and often have to write extensively, use computers, and draw their own conclusions and analyses. In lectures and seminars note-taking is encouraged, and in small group tutorials you should be prepared to participate actively. You may have to carry out original research or participate in practical experiments and projects.

Personal and academic support during your stay

You may find that you need to speak to someone regarding problems you are experiencing that are adversely affecting your studies. In the first instance, you should discuss any problems affecting your studies with your personal tutor or welfare or personal supervisor.



Checklist for studying

- Keep in regular contact with your personal academic tutor/supervisor at your place of study and let him or her know about any problems you may have that affect your studies.
- The student counsellor at your place of study, as well as the academic staff in your department, and your fellow students, can offer support and advice if you are having difficulties of any kind.
- Punctuality and attendance are particularly important. Absence without a valid reason, e.g. illness, will be looked upon very seriously and may be reported to the UK Border Agency.
- You should let your place of study know of any doubts you have about the relevance or level of your course of study before you depart for the UK. It is extremely difficult to make changes to your course, course level or extensions to the agreed period of study after your arrival, and these are sometimes simply not permitted by the UK Border Agency.

Checklist for settling in

- Have you arranged suitable accommodation?
- Do you know about Council Tax?
- Have you arranged your finances?
- Have you had a health check?
- Have you arranged medical insurance, if you are not covered under the NHS?
- Do you know what to do if you become ill?
- Are you prepared for the differences in study methods used in the UK, and do you know where to seek advice if you have any difficulties?



Out and about

Shopping

If you are living in self-catering accommodation, shopping for food is likely to be a priority. Eating the right food, and enough of it, is vital for keeping healthy (see the previous section, 'Settling in').

You may find it easier to shop in self-service shops or supermarkets, where you can use a basket or trolley provided for you to carry the goods you intend to buy.

There are smaller shops, where you can buy specialised foods from overseas, and street markets, which are particularly good for fresh fruit and vegetables, often sold at low prices.

Because of the unpredictability of the British weather it is a good idea to wear several layers of clothes, a waterproof coat and sturdy shoes. An umbrella is essential. You can find good-quality, reasonably priced clothes in high street stores, but you can find bargains in street markets, and in the second-hand shops run by charities. These shops often have clothes that are almost new, at very low prices.

Leisure activities

On campus, the students' union usually organises all kinds of social functions and supports the many clubs and societies that you can join. Joining clubs is a good way of making friends.

Various activities are organised by local authorities, and you can join evening classes, including English language classes, which you can find out about at a local library or college.

HOST – a unique opportunity for international students

HOST is a voluntary organisation supported by the British Council, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and many universities and colleges.

Volunteer hosts offer a friendly welcome and an insight into their customs and way of life. They enjoy meeting people from other countries, and can help you practise your English conversation.

There are hosts in most regions of the UK. Wherever you choose for your visit, you will be a guest rather than a tourist. Eating home-cooked meals and discovering regional practices are important parts of a HOST visit.

If you are interested, contact your international student adviser for information and a HOST application form (also available by e-mailing info@hostuk.uk).



Religion

Exploring life in the UK does not mean having to give up your own culture or religion. In the UK there are many people practising various faiths, and as the number of people from different cultures has grown, so have the facilities that allow them to lead a life according to their religious beliefs. Places of worship in most major cities and towns almost invariably include Hindu and Buddhist temples, mosques and synagogues, particularly if there is a large ethnic population. Today there are few places, other than remote areas, where the religious needs of people from other countries are not met.

The UK is a multicultural society: people from ethnic minorities now live in most areas and are a well-accepted and well-integrated part of the population. However, if you do experience any racial prejudice, speak to your student welfare officer.

Travelling around

Once you have established your study routine, you may want to take a break from your studies and travel beyond the town or city where you are living. Your time in the UK would be incomplete without spending some of that time enjoying what the country has to offer.

The cheapest way to travel is by coach – trains are more comfortable, and a lot quicker, but more expensive.

You can travel around quite cheaply with a student railcard – or coach card. Full-time students attending courses of at least 20 weeks at a UK educational institution can buy a young persons' railcard. You can get more information about student travel discounts from information centres at coach or railway stations, or ask at your place of study.

Your time in the UK can be a truly happy and rewarding experience – all you need to do is plan properly and keep in mind the information you are given at your pre-departure briefing.

Take the opportunity to read this booklet and you can be assured that there will always be people you can turn to for help and advice, wherever you choose to study in the UK.





Useful organisations

BALEAP

(The British Association of Lecturers
in English for Academic Purposes)

www.baleap.org.uk

British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education (BAC)

44 Bedford Row
London WC1R 4LL, UK

Telephone +44 (0)20 7447 2584

Fax +44 (0)20 7447 2585

E-mail info@the-bac.org

www.the-bac.org

British Council

Information Centre
Bridgewater House
58 Whitworth Street
Manchester M1 6BB, UK

Telephone +44 (0)161 957 7755

Fax +44 (0)161 957 7762

www.britishcouncil.org

www.educationuk.org

www.britishcouncil.org/accreditation

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)

1 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0ET, UK

Telephone +44 (0)870 001 0336

E-mail info@dius.gsi.gov

www.bis.gov.uk

English UK

219 St John Street
London EC1V 4LY, UK

Telephone +44 (0)20 7608 7960

Fax +44 (0)20 7608 7961

E-mail info@englishuk.com

www.englishuk.com

HM Revenue and Customs

Dorset House
Stamford Street
London SE1 9PY, UK

Telephone +44 (0)1702 366 077

Fax +44 (0)1702 367 342

www.hmrc.gov.uk/individuals

(for advice on importing personal effects
and goods click on 'travel' then 'customs
allowances')

Immigration Advisory Service (IAS)

County House
190 Great Dover Street
London SE1 4YB, UK

Telephone +44 (0)20 7967 1330

Fax +44 (0)20 7403 5875

www.iasuk.org

National Union of Students

4th Floor
184-192 Drummond Street
London NW1 3HP, UK

Telephone +44 (0)20 7380 6600

www.nus.org.uk

(offers practical advice and
information on student issues)

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

St Anne's Court
59 North Street
Belfast BT1 1NB

Telephone +44 (0)28 9023 1221

Fax +44 (0)28 9024 0960

www.nitb.com

Visit Scotland

Ocean Point one
94 Ocean Drive
Edinburgh 6JH, UK

Telephone +44 (0)845 2255121

Fax +44 (0)131 343 1513

www.visitscotland.com



Scottish Youth Hostels Association

7 Glebe Crescent
Stirling FK8 2JA, UK

Telephone +44 (0)1786 891 1400
Fax +44 (0)1786 891 1333
www.syha.org.uk

**UKCISA: The Council for
International Student Affairs**

9–17 St Albans Place
London N1 0NX, UK
www.ukcisa.org.uk

Visit Britain

Thames Tower
Black's Road
London W6 9EL, UK

Telephone +44 (0)20 8846 9000
Fax +44 (0)202 8562 0302
www.visitbritain.com

Wales Tourist Board

Brunel House
2 Fitzalan Road
Cardiff CF2 1UY, UK

Telephone +44 (0)2920 499909
Fax +44 (0)2920 485031
www.visitwales.com
www.visitwales.co.uk

Youth Hostels Association (YHA)

– National Office

Trevelyan House
Dimple Road
Matlock
Derbyshire DE4 3HY, UK

Telephone +44 (0)1629 592600
Fax +44 (0)1629 592702
www.yha.org.uk

Further information and guidance

UKCISA guidance notes

(available to download from www.ukcisa.org.uk/student/information_sheets.php)

Information sheets are available on the following subjects:

Arrival and living in the UK

- **Accommodation**
- **Arriving in the UK**
- **Driving in the United Kingdom: a guide for international students**
- **International students and culture shock**
- **Keeping healthy**
- **Preparing to return home**

Immigration

- **Making a student immigration application in your home country**
See the UK Border Agency's Visa Services leaflet for information on how to apply.
- **Making a student immigration application in the UK**
Advice on how to apply to extend your permission to be in the UK, as a student if you apply on or after 31 March 2009.
- **Working during your studies**
- **Working in the UK after your studies**

Financial support

- **Council tax and international students**
- **Financial hardship**
An outline of strategies for international students in the UK who find themselves experiencing financial hardship.
- **Welfare benefits**
Advice on if and when international students can claim government benefits and help with health care costs. Also see, Keeping healthy and EEA and Swiss students, as appropriate.
- **Sources of funding for international students**

Studying in the UK

- **Study methods used in the UK**



The UK means the United Kingdom and consists of England, Scotland, Wales (Great Britain) and Northern Ireland

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