

Driving in the United Kingdom: a guide for international students

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UKCOSA GUIDANCE NOTE FOR STUDENTS

This Guidance Note will not be automatically amended each year. Any minor updates will be made to the web version which can be downloaded from <www.ukcosa.org.uk>.

Before driving any vehicle (car, motorbike, van etc) in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), you should check that you meet all of the legal requirements which apply (a) to the driver and (b) to the vehicle; and that you are aware of the correct procedures, which may be very different from your home country.

Detailed information about all aspects of driving in England, Scotland and Wales (Great Britain) can be found on the website of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) at <www.dvla.gov.uk>.

See also 'Driving in the UK as a Student' at <www.dvla.gov.uk/drivers/drivingb.htm#Driving%20in%20GB%20as%20a%20student>.

For specific information about driving in Northern Ireland see the website of Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland at <www.dvlni.gov.uk>.

IMPORTANT LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Anyone driving a vehicle in the UK must have a valid current **licence** to drive that type of vehicle; and must be covered by **insurance** to drive that specific vehicle. The vehicle must also be **registered** in the owner's name and have valid **road tax**.

DRIVING LICENCES

You must have a licence that allows you to drive in the UK.

If you wish to drive in the UK, you must first find out whether or not you can use your existing licence and, if so, for how long. This will depend on where your licence was issued. You may be able to:

- a) drive in the UK using your current licence or
- b) apply to exchange your existing licence for a UK licence.

DRIVING IN THE UK ON YOUR EXISTING DRIVING LICENCE

If you have a driving licence issued by a country which is in the European Economic Area (EEA)

(The European Economic Area is composed of all the countries of the European Union (EU), namely Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Republic of Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom PLUS Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein).

If you hold a valid driving licence from one of the above countries and you are visiting the UK, you can drive for as long as your licence remains valid. Alternatively, you can apply at any time to exchange your licence for a British one. If you wish to continue driving in the UK after your EEA licence expires, a British driving licence must be obtained.

The information leaflet INF38 'Driving in Great Britain (GB) as a visitor or a new resident' explains the current rules affecting foreign driving licence holders who visit or come to live in Great Britain and is available from the DVLA website at <www.dvla.gov.uk/forms/onlineleaflets.htm>.

For driving in Northern Ireland, see the website of Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland at <www.dvlni.gov.uk>.

If you have a driving licence issued by a country which is NOT in the European Economic Area (EEA)

(a) If you hold a licence from a designated country

you can drive any category of vehicle shown on your licence for up to 12 months from the date you last entered the UK.

List of designated countries:

- for GB (England, Scotland and Wales): Australia, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Falkland Islands, Hong Kong, Japan, Monaco, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland and Zimbabwe
- for Northern Ireland: Australia; Barbados; British Virgin Islands; Hong Kong; Japan; Malta; New Zealand; Republic of Cyprus; Singapore; Switzerland and Zimbabwe

Provided your full licence remains valid, you can drive small vehicles for 12 months from the time you became resident. To ensure continuous driving entitlement a UK driving licence must be obtained before this period elapses, by exchanging your licence for a GB or Northern Irish one. If you do not do this you must stop driving although you may apply to exchange your licence at any time within 5 years of becoming resident.

For information on exchanging your licence for a GB/Northern Ireland one, see <www.dvla.gov.uk/drivers/drivingb.htm#6.%20How%20to%20exchange%20your%20licence%20for%20a%20GB%20licence>.

(b) If you hold a licence issued in Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man

For information on driving in GB/Northern Ireland on a licence issued in Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, see <www.dvla.gov.uk/drivers/drivingb.htm#4.%20Jersey,%20Guernsey%20or%20Isle%20of%20Man>.

(c) If you hold a licence issued in any other country

Students who hold a non-Community licence or an International Driving Permit may drive here for up to 12 months.

They will be able to take a test and obtain a full licence once they have been in GB for 6 months.

You can drive any category of small vehicle shown on your licence for up to 12 months from the time you became resident. To ensure continuous driving entitlement a provisional GB or Northern Ireland licence must have been obtained and a driving test passed before the 12-month period elapses. If you obtain a provisional licence during this period, you are **not** subject to provisional licence conditions e.g. displaying 'L' plates or being supervised by a qualified driver or

being precluded from motorways. However, if you do not pass a test within the 12-month concessionary period you will **not** be allowed to drive as a full licence holder and provisional licence conditions **will** apply.

If you do not apply for a provisional licence within the first 12 months you must stop driving and obtain a British provisional licence with a view to passing a driving test. Provisional licence conditions will then apply.

MOPEDS AND MOTORCYCLES

Even if you have a licence for driving a car, you still need to complete a Compulsory Basic Training (CBT) course before riding a moped or a motorcycle in the UK. On successful completion of the course you will get a training certificate (DL196) which is valid for two years. You will need to show your certificate to the examiner when you take your practical test. If you have any queries about CBT phone the Driving Standards Agency on 0115 901 2500 and ask for the CBT Section or see 'Learning to Drive or Ride' at <www.dvla.gov.uk/drivers/learn2dr.htm>.

For more information see 'Driving in GB as a Student' at <www.dvla.gov.uk/drivers/drivingb.htm#Driving%20in%20GB%20as%20a%20student> or the following DVLA leaflets:

- INF38 'Driving in Great Britain (GB) as a visitor or a new resident'
- D100 'What you need to know about driving licences'
- INF45 'Your photocard driving licence explained'

which are available in Post Offices or from the DVLA website at <www.dvla.gov.uk/forms/online_leaflets.htm>.

Note: it is a criminal offence to drive using a licence that is not valid in the UK. In addition, if you do so, your car insurance will be invalidated and you will be committing a further criminal offence of 'driving without valid motor insurance'.

LEARNING TO DRIVE IN THE UK

If you wish to drive a car in the UK but do not currently hold a valid licence to do so, you will need to apply for a provisional licence and take a driving test in order to obtain a full licence.

Driving licences are issued by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) <www.dvla.gov.uk> in England, Scotland and Wales and in Northern Ireland by Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland <www.dvlni.gov.uk>.

In Northern Ireland, those who do not hold a licence must have been studying there for at least 6 months prior to taking a driving test or applying for a full licence. For more information see <www.dvlni.gov.uk/drivers/foreign_student.htm>.

In the rest of the UK (that is, England, Scotland and Wales), if you want to take a GB driving test you must be normally resident in Great Britain. However, if you have moved to GB having recently been permanently resident in another state of the EC/EEA, you must have been normally resident in GB for 185 days in the 12 months prior to your application for a driving test and a full licence.

A provisional licence requires you to display red and white 'L'-plates ('D' plates in Wales) at the front and back of the vehicle and to be accompanied by another person in the passenger seat when you drive who (a) is over 21 years old, and (b) has passed their driving test and held a valid licence for at least 3 years.

You are not allowed to drive on a motorway if you hold a provisional licence.

See 'Learning to Drive or Ride' <www.dvla.gov.uk/drivers/learn2dr.htm>.

There are many driving-schools in the UK where you can pay for lessons with a qualified instructor. Details of instructors in your local area can be found in the Yellow Pages directory at <www.yell.com> or <www.driving-schools.co.uk/cgi-bin/driving/pagewiz.cgi?pg=/index.html> or <www.bt.com/thephonebook>.

INSURANCE

The law in UK requires all motorists to have valid insurance that provides them or anyone they permit to use the vehicle with insurance cover for the vehicle that they are driving. There are 3 different types of insurance policies:

- Comprehensive (the fullest cover);
- Third Party, Fire and Theft; or
- Third Party only (the minimum cover).

If you have a vehicle in the UK (see section 'Buying a car in the UK', below), it is your responsibility to arrange insurance cover.

If borrowing a friend's car or other vehicle, always check that they have insurance which allows you to drive it. Some car-owners have insurance which allows anyone with a valid driving licence to use their vehicle; but many have insurance which covers the vehicle owner or certain named drivers only. If the car you are going to drive does not belong to you, then even if there is an insurance policy in force, it may not cover you to drive unless you are a named driver or it is an 'any driver' policy. However, even 'any driver' policies may not cover learner drivers, or people driving on foreign licences. It is the driver's responsibility to make sure that she or he is insured to drive. It is no defence to say that you believed (wrongly) that you were insured. Always check before driving.

For more information on arranging insurance for your vehicle, see the section below on 'Buying a car in the UK'

If hiring/renting a car, you will need to show a valid current driving licence. Insurance and road tax are normally provided by the rental company and included in the hire charge.

Before driving in the UK, you should check that all of these legal requirements have been met, as driving without insurance (or a valid driving licence, or road tax) is unlawful and can cause legal problems if you come to the attention of the police. Indeed, breaking the law by driving without the correct valid documents can lead to you being fined and banned from driving, and further offences can result in you being sent to prison.

ON THE ROAD

In addition to having current valid road tax, insurance and driving-licence:

- you must drive on the left-hand side of the road and overtake on the right-hand side
- if you are riding a motor cycle or a moped, you must wear a crash-helmet
- the driver and front seat passengers must wear seat belts; rear seat passengers must wear seat belts where they are fitted
- you must not drive whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- you must observe speed limits: 30 or 40mph (miles per hour) in built-up areas but some zones in towns and cities have lower limits, 70 mph on motorways and 60 mph on all other roads unless a different limit is displayed (e.g. 50)
- you must observe the minimum age requirements. Generally, these are 17 years for cars and motorcycles, 18 years for medium sized vehicles – for more detailed

information see <www.dvla.gov.uk> or for Northern Ireland <www.dvlni.gov.uk>.

Further information about 'Your Legal Obligations as a Driver and/or Keeper of a Vehicle' can be found on the DVLA website at <www.dvla.gov.uk/vehicles/obligations.htm>.

Essential reading for anyone planning to drive in the UK is *The Highway Code*, both in terms of road safety and because many of its rules are in fact legal requirements. The Highway Code costs around £1.99 and can be bought from bookshops or on-line at <www.highwaycode.gov.uk> which also contains a 'Test Yourself' section.

BUYING A VEHICLE IN THE UK

Legal requirements

All motor vehicles in the UK must be **registered, taxed and insured**. If the car is more than 3 years old, the car must be checked and a Certificate of Roadworthiness, known as an MoT Test, obtained every year before the expiry of the last MoT, which is valid for 12 months.

Registration

If you buy a brand-new car in the UK, the dealer will usually arrange for the car to be registered for you. You will need to provide documentary proof of your name and address. You must make sure that the details shown on your Registration Document/Certificate are correct. If the dealer does not register the car for you, make sure that they give you the appropriate application form so that you can apply yourself.

If you are thinking of buying a used ('second-hand') car or other vehicle in the UK, we strongly recommend that you read the helpful information on the DVLA website at <www.dvla.gov.uk/vehicles/adviceon.htm#Advice%20On%20Buying%20A%20Used%20Vehicle>.

One of the most important aspects of buying a used vehicle is to check that it is indeed the property of the seller. Before buying a vehicle you should satisfy yourself that the seller either owns the vehicle, or is entitled to offer it for sale. Ask to see the bill of sale in the seller's name or other evidence such as a hire purchase discharge document; and always ask for a receipt of purchase on completion of the deal. If you are buying privately, you should view the vehicle at the address on the registration certificate V5C. You should check that the vehicle identification number (VIN) printed on the registration certificate V5C corresponds with the VIN on the vehicle (usually found on a plate in the engine compartment). If the vehicle is not registered in the

seller's name, ask why. Never purchase a vehicle unless it has a registration certificate.

You may wish to make a check through the DVLA'S Vehicle Check Service (details on the above website). The Vehicle Identity Check (VIC) has been introduced to help reduce car crime. It is intended to deter criminals from disguising stolen cars with the identity of written off ones (that is, vehicles which have been badly damaged in an accident and which have been written off by an insurance company). This is a telephone service and calls are charged at 49p per minute. The telephone number is 0906 185 85 85 and the service operates Monday to Friday between 8.00am and 8.30pm, and Saturday between 8.00am and 5.30pm.

For Northern Ireland, the number is 0845 402 4000 and the line is open Monday-Friday 0900-1700hrs (UK time); and there is useful 'Advice On Buying A Used Vehicle' on the DVLNI website at <www.dvlni.gov.uk/vehicles/purchasenew.htm>.

Note: if you buy a vehicle which is later identified as having been stolen, you may have no right in law to its ownership and you could lose both the vehicle and the money you paid for it. For more details, see the DVLA website (link above).

When you have bought the vehicle, you will need to register it in your name.

If you bring your vehicle with you from your home country, then you may do so for up to 6 months in any 12-month period provided that it is fully registered and tax paid in the country of registration.

If you wish to keep your vehicle in the UK for over 6 months, you will need to register your vehicle in the UK by contacting the DVLA see <www.dvla.gov.uk> or for Northern Ireland the DVLNI <www.dvlni.gov.uk>.

For more information on Vehicle Registration see <www.dvla.gov.uk/vehicles/vehicle.htm> (for Northern Ireland <www.dvlni.gov.uk/vehicles/register.htm>)

ROAD TAX

You must ensure that road tax for your car is paid before you drive it. You can obtain a tax disc by completing an application form (V10) that is available from any Post Office and online at <www.dvla.gov.uk/forms/frms_vehicles.htm>

You will need to take the completed form together with the following documents to a Post Office that issues tax discs:

- the Registration Document/Certificate (see above); and
- the certificate of insurance (see below); and
- (if the vehicle is over 3 years old) a current test certificate of roadworthiness (MoT). The MoT test is available at most garages, but make sure that the garage is an approved MoT centre (it will display a sign which says this). The tax disc must be displayed in your car at all times. (Most people place them on the inside of the windscreen).

INSURANCE COVER

The cost of motor insurance cover will vary according to a number of factors such as your age, how long you have been driving, where you are living, the age and value of your car and the type of car you have. Costs may vary widely between insurance companies for the same cover, so you may want to shop around.

Endsleigh Insurance (www.endsleigh.co.uk) specialises in motor insurance for students (see address list). You will also find a wide range of insurance companies listed in your local telephone directory, or your bank or building society may have a close link to one.

If you intend to use your vehicle in Northern Ireland you must ensure that the insurance policy covers you for this in this area for the UK.

Insurance cover in Northern Ireland is more expensive than in the rest of the UK.

MOTORING ORGANISATIONS

There are a number of motoring organisations in the UK that offer a range of services to the motorist, including breakdown assistance and recovery, insurance and route planning. They tend to charge a membership fee and make additional charges for the particular services you may wish to buy. You may find that NUS (National Union of Students) members get special rates from some motoring organisations. Examples of motoring organisations:

www.rac.co.uk
www.theaa.com
www.greenflag.com

USEFUL WEBSITES

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (England, Scotland and Wales)

www.dvla.gov.uk

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland

www.dvlni.gov.uk

Government information (including motoring)

www.direct.gov.uk/Homepage/fs/en

Endsleigh insurance

www.endsleigh.co.uk

INFORMATION LEAFLETS

- INF38 'Driving in Great Britain (GB) as a visitor or a new resident'
- D100 'What you need to know about driving licences'
- INF45 'Your photocard driving licence explained'

These are available in Post Offices or from the DVLA website at <www.dvla.gov.uk/forms/online_leaflets.htm>.

GUIDANCE NOTES

A complete selection of Guidance Notes is available to download from:

www.ukcosa.org.uk/pages/guidenote.htm



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 9-17 St Albans Place
 London N1 0NX, UK

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