



First steps
A pre-departure guide for
international students
coming to study in the UK
2006–07

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Getting started – what will it cost?

Immigration procedures before you leave

Hundreds of thousands of international students worldwide choose the UK every year because it offers outstanding opportunities. If you have this pre-departure booklet, you've probably decided to study in the UK, in which case you've made an excellent decision.

Use these notes in conjunction with the first steps video – *Preparing for entry clearance* – which is available to watch from your local British Council office.

In many countries, your first step will be to apply for entry clearance. If this applies to you, you should first obtain the visa application form VAF1¹ and the first steps British Council guidance note – *Preparing for entry clearance** at a British Mission in the country of your nationality, or the country in which you are living.

An online visa application facility is now available in a growing number of countries. To see if this applies to you, go to www.ukvisas.gov.uk and check the online application country list, which you will find on the application form and guidance page.

Note that visas, if required, cannot be obtained on arrival in the UK, but must be applied for in advance.

Assessing your costs

The two major costs involved in studying are course fees and living expenses.

¹ VAF1 – visa application forms available to download from www.ukvisas.gov.uk by selecting 'How to apply'.

* The first steps guidance note is available to download from www.educationuk.org by selecting 'Living in the UK' from one of the drop-down boxes, and then by clicking on 'Immigration'. It is also available from your local British Council office in hard copy.

Course fees

You should bear in mind that course fees vary according to the course and where you will be studying. Also, the course fees will almost certainly increase every year. Do not underestimate the amount of money that you will need. It is British government policy that international students should pay the full cost of their studies.

It is up to each institution to set a fee, so this does vary. You should always obtain from your institution details of the full cost of study, payments of deposits and fees, and accommodation.

In addition to paying tuition fees, you will be expected to buy your own books and equipment, and some colleges will expect you to pay examination fees. For some courses students may have to pay bench fees to cover the costs of laboratory experiments. Some universities such as Oxford or Cambridge may also charge students a college fee as well as tuition fees.

Living expenses

The cost of living in the UK is not the same throughout the country. Generally, it is more expensive to live in London and the south-east of England, and cheaper in the north, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Living costs will be higher for couples and families. Below is a rough guide to basic living costs (accommodation, lighting, heating, food, daily travel, clothing, leisure, books and incidental expenses) for a single student for a nine-month period.

Average cost of living for a typical student 2005–06

London

Academic year	£7,300
Month	£811

Outside London

Academic year	£5,936
Month	£659

UK education fees

English language courses

Fees vary greatly, but expect to pay around £100 a week for large-class tuition and £500 a week or more for intensive, small-class tuition.

Always check the cost of fees with the school or college to which you are thinking of applying.

Academic English study courses may cost £100 to £200 a week; some universities offer these free of charge.

Tuition fees	
Boarding school	£7,000 – £16,500
Career-based training and professional courses	
	£3,900 – £4,800
First degree	
Arts	£6,250 – £7,650
Science	£6,500 – £9,950
Clinical	£6,960 – £18,000
Postgraduate degree	
Arts	£6,750 – £8,200
Science	£6,500 – £9,950
Clinical	£6,200 – £17,400
MBA courses	
	£7,500 – £13,500
but some high-profile business schools may charge £20,000 a year	

In boarding schools, fees cover education, accommodation and meals. You will have to pay your own living costs when you take career-based training, a professional course, or when you are an undergraduate or postgraduate student.

The fees quoted above are typical 'overseas' fees. But some international students qualify for 'home' fees (the fees charged to British students), which are even lower because they are subsidised by the British government. If you have been living in the UK for a while already, or if you're a national of an EU country, you may qualify for these reduced fees. Contact your local British Council office for further details, and see the UKCOSA guidance note: *Fees and student support* (www.ukcosa.org.uk/pages/guidenote.htm).

Estimated cost of living in the UK, 2006–07

	London	Outside London
Books	£252	£252
Photocopying	£82	£82
Rent	£3,048	£2,301
Utility bills	£385	£385
Food	£1,270	£1,067
Laundry	£102	£102
Insurance	£95	£95
Clothing	£411	£411
Travel	£899	£445
Leisure	£956	£796
Total (minimum) (excludes tuition fees)	£7,300	£5,936

Special reductions are offered for students at many local shops, theatres, cinemas, museums and galleries, and special student fares are available on buses and trains. Ask your students' union for details.

Useful organisations

BALEAP

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

www.baleap.org.uk

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 Education and Skills (DfES)

Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT, UK

Telephone +44 (0)870 000 2288

Fax +44 (0)20 7925 6335

E-mail info@dfes.gsi.gov

www.dfes.gov.uk

English UK

56 Buckingham Gate
London SW1 6AG, UK

Telephone +44 (0)20 7802 9200

Fax +44 (0)20 7802 9201

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.hmce.gov.uk/public/index.html

(advice on importing personal effects
and goods)

Immigration Advisory Service (IAS)

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

Telephone +44 (0)20 7967 1200

Duty Officer +44 (0)20 7378 9191

(24 hours)

Fax +44 (0)20 7403 5875

www.iasuk.org

The 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

UKCOSA: The Council for International Education

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

www.ukcosa.org.uk

Further information and guidance

Available to download from
www.educationuk.org by selecting
'Living in the UK' from one of the
drop-down boxes, then:

Studying and living in the UK 2006–07

(available from your local
British Council office or from
the website above)

Click on 'Living in the UK' then click
on 'Immigration', then:

first steps British Council guidance
note – *Preparing for entry clearance*

Visa application form (available from
your local British Mission or the
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
website at www.ukvisas.gov.uk (click
on 'How to apply').

UKCOSA guidance notes

(available to download from
www.ukcosa.org.uk/pages/guidenote/htm)

Include:

- Accommodation
- Arriving in the UK
- Driving in Great Britain: a guide
for international students
- Choosing the right course
- Dependants of international
students
- EEA students
- Fees and student support
- I am coming to the UK to start
my studies
- What do I need to do about
immigration?
- Keeping healthy
- Learning English in the UK
- Opening and running a bank
account in the UK
- Preparing for study in the UK
- Pre-university courses in the
further education sector
- Study methods used in the UK
- Welfare benefits and
international students
- Working in the UK during
your studies.

Preparing for your journey

You must be fully prepared for your journey and arrival in the UK before you leave home. Your place of study should have sent you information on how to get there and how much it will cost. You should also have been given a 24-hour telephone number and the name of someone you can contact if you have any problems on your journey. You should plan your journey from your point of entry in 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 immediately 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.

Visit Britain may have an office in your country – consult their website www.visitbritain.com. The British Tourist Authority can give you help and advice to help you plan your journey.

It is assumed that you will be arriving at an airport in the UK, although other methods of transport are detailed in the 'Arrival' section on page 10. If you are studying near to or in London, you may choose to book a flight into Gatwick, Heathrow, Luton, Stansted or London City airports. 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. This will save on the cost of a train journey, cut down on travel time and avoid having to stay overnight in costly London accommodation.

Documents required for you 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
- 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 £200 should be enough, but if you have any family with you, you will need correspondingly more.

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 18.

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.

If you are on a course of six months or less, it is a good idea to open an account with a multinational bank before coming to the UK, especially if you can use its cash machines in the UK to withdraw money from your account. It is also useful to have a credit card that you can use in the UK. Otherwise bring any cash you need while you are here in the form of travellers' cheques.

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 19.

Luggage

You will have a free baggage allowance, which will be shown on your air ticket; this is usually 23 kg or one bag of limited size, but it will be 20 kg on some airlines. 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 Customs and Excise (www.hmrc.gov.uk).

Insurance

You should insure your luggage, personal possessions and money before leaving your home country, as risks in large cities can be considerable, especially if you are unfamiliar with the UK. If this is not possible, ask your bank or student welfare officer for advice. Make sure you really understand the conditions of any insurance policy – if necessary, have it explained to you fully before you sign any forms.

You should consider taking out health insurance in case you need private medical treatment, although some health care services in the UK are free of charge. It is also advisable to obtain annual medical and accident insurance.

Endsleigh specialise in insurance for students. Contact www.endsleigh.co.uk.

Security

Pickpockets can be a hazard in many cities in the UK. Always carry your money in an inside pocket, never in your back trouser pocket or in the outer pockets of a coat or jacket. If you leave your coat or jacket anywhere, always take your money with you. Never leave a handbag unattended, even for short periods; always keep it with you.

Never carry a large amount of cash with you, because if it is stolen or lost you are not likely to get it back. Try to carry only enough cash to meet your day-to-day expenses. Travellers' cheques should be in small denominations such as £5, £10 and £20, so you will have enough money for your daily needs. Remember to keep a note of the serial numbers in case you lose them.

Similarly, you should take care not to leave luggage or briefcases in waiting rooms or on railway platforms, luggage racks or anywhere else. It is safer to carry valuables such as cameras, radios and computers with you and keep a note of their serial numbers.

Your mobile phone is valuable. Whenever you are out be aware of your surroundings, and don't use your phone in crowded areas or where you feel unsafe. If your phone is stolen, report the number to the network operator and the police – the phone will then be useless to the thieves.

Finally, take special care of your passport, tickets and other personal documents and for further information visit www.educationuk.org – select 'Living in the UK' from one of the drop-down boxes and 'Health and safety' and then click on the publication *Safety first – a personal guide for international students*.

Preparations for your course

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

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 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 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 of someone you can contact at your place of study if 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 the point of entry 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 any family, if they 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 visited www.educationuk.org? Click on 'Living in the UK' from one of the drop-down boxes and 'Health and safety' and then click on the publication *Safety first – a personal guide for international students*.

- Have you taken out personal insurance?

- Have you checked with your local British Mission what you must declare at customs?

- Have you weighed your baggage to ensure that it is within your baggage allowance and is easily transportable for your onward journey?

Arrival

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 through Paris or 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.

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 will be much easier if you fly to the nearest regional airport 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 you must 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 must not 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 might appear a difficult and confusing place, but if you follow the steps below, getting through 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, which 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 or EEA passports and one or more zones for all other passport holders.
- The immigration officer will want to see that your documents are in order and that you have an up-to-date passport, your landing card from the aeroplane 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 entry clearance, which they must have obtained 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 might 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 phone 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:

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

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 the train arrives in London. If you drive through the tunnel you will pass through UK immigration at the terminal in France before taking your car on to the shuttle train.

UK and other European Economic Area Nationals/Others

Immigration stamp

If you are not a visa national, and plan to sort out your immigration when you land in the UK, the immigration officer will stamp your passport. If you have already obtained an entry clearance or visa, the time limit of your stay and any conditions will be included on this.

Employment stamp

To be allowed to work in the UK while you are in the UK as a student depends on whether you are:

- 1 an EEA national; or
- 2 not an EEA national, and have a 'restriction on working' in your passport; or
- 3 not an EEA national and have a 'prohibition on working' in your passport.

1 EEA nationals

If you are an EEA national* or a Swiss national, you can work freely in the UK, either for an employer or as a self-employed person. If any family members come with you to the UK, they can work in the UK as well, no matter what their nationality.

2 Other nationals: 'restriction on working' stamp

If you come for a course lasting more than six months, the immigration authorities should automatically put a 'restriction on working' stamp in your passport (see page 12). It allows you to work under certain conditions:

- During term time, you can work up to 20 hours a week and full-time during vacations (you can also work longer if the work placement is an essential part of your course – e.g. the work period of a sandwich course – or if you are on a degree course and the work placement is an internship lasting no more than three months).
- You can't run your own business, be self-employed, or work as a professional sportsperson or entertainer.
- You can't take up a permanent full-time position (but you can do full-time, short-term work during the holidays).

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

If you are enrolled on a course lasting more than six months and you do not have this stamp, speak to an adviser at your institution immediately. **You should not start work.** It may be that a mistake has been made that needs to be corrected.

If you are from a country where it is not compulsory to apply for a visa to travel to the UK before travelling you can either apply for an entry certificate or ask the immigration officer to stamp your passport with a restriction stamp.

Even if you expect to be given a 'restriction on working' stamp, or already have one, you cannot include your earnings as evidence of your ability to support yourself financially. However, there are two exceptions to this rule:

- if you will be attending a publicly funded college or university and the institution guarantees that it will employ you and can provide details of your page
- or
- if you will be attending a sandwich course at a publicly funded college or university and the institution guarantees that there will be a job for you and can provide details of your pay.

Then you can include these earning as evidence of your ability to support yourself.

What does a 'restriction on working' look like?

It can be worded in two different ways:

No work or recourse to public funds
Work (and any changes) must be authorised

Leave to enter the United Kingdom on condition that the holder maintains and accommodates himself and any dependants without recourse to public funds and does not enter or change employment paid or unpaid without the consent of the Secretary of State for Employment and does not engage in business or profession without the consent of the Secretary of State for the Home Department is hereby given for/until

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3 Other nationals: 'prohibition on working' stamp

If you are from a country outside the EEA and your course in the UK lasts for six months or less, the immigration authorities are likely to put a 'prohibition on working' stamp in your passport. It is worded as follows: 'No work or recourse to public funds', which means that you are not allowed to work at all while you are in the UK (see next column).

If you are coming for a course of six months or less, and want to work part-time, you should explain this when you apply for entry clearance (or when you land, if you are not getting entry clearance in advance). Remember, you must be able to support yourself without needing any money that you earn (apart from the two situations mentioned above). The officer might then give you a 'restriction on working' stamp instead.

If you have already been given a 'prohibition on working' stamp, you may be able to apply to have it changed. Ask the international officer or student adviser at your institution for advice.

Family members

If you bring your spouse and children with you, their passports will show the conditions that apply to them.

They may be given either:

- a 'prohibition on working' stamp – as explained above, this means they are not allowed to work in the UK
- an entry clearance or stamp that does not mention employment at all – in this case, they are free to work in the UK without any limitations; they will be given this if they show evidence that you have been given permission to be in the UK for at least 12 months.

What does a 'prohibition on working' stamp look like?

It can be worded in two different ways:

No work or recourse to public funds

Leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom on condition that the holder maintains and accommodates himself and any dependants without recourse to public funds, does not enter employment paid or unpaid and does not engage in any business or profession, is hereby given for/until

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Working after your course ends

Until now, the majority of degree course students have found it difficult to obtain permission to stay on in the UK after their studies for work (apart from training for a professional or specialist qualification, or work experience, before returning home).

However, the UK government has reviewed its policies, and some changes have been introduced that make it easier for students to stay on for work. You can find information about the current position if you look at the work permits web site: www.workpermits.gov.uk.

You can also find information about the current position if you look at the UKCOSA website: www.ukcosa.org.uk/pages/guidenote.htm – guidance note *Working in the UK after your studies*.

National insurance and tax

If you work in the UK under any of the arrangements mentioned above, you must pay UK taxes and National Insurance (NI) contributions, as British workers do. You must also apply for a NI number once you start work: telephone your local Benefits Agency office and arrange to go and complete an application from there (listed under 'Benefits Agency' in the telephone directory). It may take up to 12 weeks before you receive your NI number, but you can start work without it.

Police registration

Your entry clearance (the stamp put in your passport when you arrive in the UK) 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 1208, Monday to Friday, 0900 to 1630) or, 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 one photograph only 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.

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 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 do 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 in to the UK, you can check with HM Revenue and Customs (see Useful organisations, page 23).

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) have a website – www.defra.gov.uk – that gives information on illegal imports 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

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.

There are also increasing numbers of flights direct to the larger non-London airports such as Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and Newcastle. You can also check out the institution's website for onward travel details and the British Tourist Authority 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 in your information pack.

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

Telephone

Public telephones or 'payphones' are widely 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 are generally expensive to use in the UK, although there are a number of tariffs and service providers to suit everyone.

Useful numbers

UK Directory Enquiries	118 500
International Directory Enquiries	118 505
UK Operator	100
International Operator	155
Emergencies	999

The Underground (also known as the Tube)

At Heathrow airport there are signs showing the way to the Underground (none of the other London airports have Underground access). Before buying a ticket you should look at one of the large Underground maps to check your route. The Underground has 11 different lines, each shown in a different colour. You might need to change lines to get to your destination, in which case you should get off at the station where the lines cross, and follow the signs for the line you want.

Before using the Underground, you will need to buy a ticket from the ticket machines or the ticket office. To get to the train, you might need to show the ticket to the ticket inspector, but at most stations there are machines where you put your ticket in a slot, the barrier opens and you must take the ticket out again. Travelling on the Underground is the quickest way to get around London and is the best way to get to London's mainline stations for trains to take you to your place of study.

Buses and coaches

The A2 Airbus runs from Heathrow airport through central London to Euston and King's Cross railway stations and is a cheap and convenient way of getting into the city.

At all major UK airports there are large bus and coach stations with direct or connecting services to most cities and towns in the UK. Coaches are very inexpensive and the airport to city centre services can often save time and stress when compared with an equivalent rail journey. Details of airport links and fares can be found on www.gobycoach.com.

Whenever possible, it is best to book a coach in advance as they are very popular. Also, because they often stop at a number of points in a city or town, be sure that you know where you need to be dropped off before you start your journey. If necessary, ask the driver or conductor to tell you when you have arrived.

Trains

There are train services from all of the London airports into central London and from many of the regional airports such as Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle, to their city centres. If the city centre is not your final destination it is possible to make connections through the city centre stations to any part of the UK and, from certain airports, there are also direct trains to other parts of the country.

If you are arriving in London and travelling onwards you will probably need to change stations as London has seven stations, each for a different part of the country. The London stations are all connected by the Underground services and by bus, but you should allow plenty of time to cross London and check your route carefully.

If you arrive by sea there are direct trains to London and beyond from all Channel ports and you will be able to purchase your ticket to your final destination.

The Eurostar train will take you direct to London Waterloo station in London.

Trains do not run all night and there is a reduced service over the weekend and on bank holidays. If possible avoid arriving late at night or over the weekend when there are fewer options for onward travel. Try to arrive early in the day so that you can complete your journey in daylight.

To check your rail journey visit www.nationalrail.co.uk or www.travelline.org.uk.

Taxis

Whether travelling to London from Heathrow or Gatwick airports or the Channel ports, travelling into central London by taxi is very expensive. If you must take a taxi, ask the driver for a rough idea of what the fare will be before you start and, for your own safety, make sure that you are using a licensed taxi.

The taxis that you will find on the ranks at airports and railway stations are licensed but if someone approaches you in the arrival hall with an offer of taxi they are unlikely to be licensed.

Accommodation

If you need hotel accommodation overnight in London or the regions you are strongly advised to make a reservation before you leave your home country.

The British Council uses an agency for hotel accommodation, and they can be contacted by e-mail, fax or telephone from your home country (see page 16 for details).

If you arrive and have not arranged overnight accommodation, you may contact the agency at one of their desks at Heathrow and Gatwick airports and all main London railway stations (look for the British Hotel Reservation Centre signs). Or you can book accommodation when you arrive using a free telephone number, which is valid throughout the UK: 0800 783 6695.

The agency desk at Heathrow airport is located within the Terminals 1–2–3 underground station to the right of the ticket office and at the Terminal 4 underground station opposite the ticket office. At Gatwick airport, the desk is located on the Arrivals level on the main concourse opposite the customs doors.

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 obtain a receipt for your deposit that includes the date, the amount paid and the words 'deposit for accommodation'?

Useful organisations

The British Council Hotel Reservation Service
13 Grosvenor Gardens
London SW1 0BD, UK

Telephone 0800 783 6695
(free of charge within the UK; available 24 hours)
or +44 (0)20 7825 1506 (from overseas)
Fax +44 (0)20 7828 2881
E-mail hotels@britishcouncil.org

British Tourist Authority

Thames Tower
Blacks Road
London W6 9EL, UK

Telephone +44 (0)20 8846 9000
Fax +44 (0)20 8503 0302
www.visitbritain.com

Scottish Tourist Board

23 Ravelston Terrace
Edinburgh EH4 3TP, UK

Telephone +44 (0)131 332 2433
Fax +44 (0)131 315 4545
www.visitscotland.net

Wales Tourist Board

Brunel House
2 Fitzalan Road
Cardiff CF24 0UY, UK

Telephone +44 (0)29 2049 9909
Fax +44 (0)29 2048 5031
www.visitwales.com

Settling in

Accommodation

If you have not already arranged suitable accommodation, finding somewhere to live will be one of your main concerns during your first days in the UK, and this can be very difficult.

You need to think carefully about your needs: for example, is the accommodation convenient to get to your place of study by public transport; the size of your room; and the amount of privacy you will have for quiet study.

It is important to think about how secure your accommodation will be, the facilities available and the cost.

The accommodation office at your place of study is there to give you advice on all of this.

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 through 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 should 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 very 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 their 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.

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 the Council Tax.

If you live in an educational institution's hall 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).

- 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 in to open your account.

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. 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.

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 the 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 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 spouse and children under 16 (or under 19 if they are still at school or college). You should register with a doctor as an NHS patient and take 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 treatment of any 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.

Climate and clothing

The weather in the UK is notoriously changeable. You should expect prolonged cold and rain and weeks of overcast weather during winter, usually from November to March. It is extremely important to keep warmly dressed and to use hats, scarves and gloves. It gets dark quite early in the autumn and winter months. Seasons can start at different times each year, which can be confusing.

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 some of the following 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, yoghurt 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 practise 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.com.

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.

Checklist for studying

- Keep in regular contact with your personal academic tutor at your place of study and let them 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.

- 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.

Checklist for settling in

- Have you arranged suitable accommodation?

- Do you know about the 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 your first 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 should 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 through 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 give help with English conversation practice.

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 students@hostuk.org).

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 person's 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 in detail, and watch the first steps videos at any local British Council office, as these give lots of useful information. 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

British Universities Accommodation Consortium

PO Box 1868
University Park
Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK
Telephone +44 (0)115 950 4571
Fax +44 (0)115 950 4571
www.buac.co.uk

Plus National Union of Students

461 Holloway Road
London N7 6LJ, UK
Telephone +44 (0)20 7272 8900
Fax +44 (0)7263 5713
www.nusonline.org.uk
(offers practical advice and information on student issues)

Scottish Tourist Board

23 Ravelston Terrace
Edinburgh EH4 3TP, UK
Telephone +44 (0)131 315 4545
www.visitscotland.net

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

Visit Britain

Thames Tower
Blacks Road
London W6EL, 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 0UY, UK
Telephone +44 (0)2920 499909
Fax +44 (0)2920 485031

Youth Hostels Association (YHA) – National Office

7 St Stephen's Hill
St Albans
Hertfordshire AL1 2DY, UK
Telephone +44 (0)1727 855215
Fax +44 (0)1727 844126
www.yha.org.uk

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