STUDYING IN THE UK:
YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE
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WHY STUDY IN THE UK?
MULTICULTURAL BRITAIN
Hundreds of thousands of international students choose to study in the UK each year. Other cultures and ethnicities are intrinsic to Britain's cultural and social identity following decades of immigration from Europe, Africa and Asia; this makes transition into UK society and culture very easy. In a city like London, which is one of the world’s tourist hotspots, an international student will never feel homesick - you can always find treasures and reminders of home at every turn (for example, most towns will have one or more Indian restaurants on their high street).

HISTORY AND TRADITION
The UK has one of the longest traditions of international higher education, with overseas students attending its universities for decades; many of the world’s greatest minds and leading figures were educated at British universities, from Stephen Hawking to Bill Clinton.

The term ‘Oxbridge’ is world-renowned as the toast of academic excellence (as well as for the famous annual boat race). However, we recommend you keep an open mind and consider all the universities and colleges which the UK has to offer. For a comparatively small country, the UK offers a lot of variety; so ensure you make an informed decision which is perfect for you.

Another reason why the UK holds an advantage over other destinations is that it has a farther-reaching historical background. This is something which many students - whether History students or not - are attracted by (especially if their own country does not have the same rich history). This provides many extra-curricular options for daytrips and things to see.

PERFECT YOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS
What better place to sharpen your English language skills than in England itself (or Wales, Scotland or Ireland for that matter)? Studying in the UK will give you the opportunity to constantly sharpen your language skills as each day goes by. While you must be proficient in English to a good standard in order to be successfully accepted on to a course in the UK, there is no reason why you should settle for being simply satisfactory or passable. Continue to improve your language skills and you’ll amaze employers when looking for that first graduate job (as well as your friends and family at home).

VALUE OF A UK QUALIFICATION
As mentioned above, Britain has one of the most highly-regarded reputations in the education world. Every year, Britain consistently sit at the top of world rankings of universities. Not just anyone is accepted at a British university! Therefore, those who emerge with a qualification from a university in the UK immediately distinguish themselves as a special prospect in their field; this is important when trying to get that crucial first job after graduating.

EXPLORE FURTHER
Why Study in the UK
Start searching for a course, university or scholarship in the UK
THE UK EDUCATION SYSTEM
Education systems do vary from one country to another. Differences can include how academic years are structured, how much tuition fees are and even the names for things – some are vital to know, while others will save you from moments of confusion.

Here are a few things you should know about Britain’s higher education system before you thinking about applying...

- Undergraduate (bachelor’s or BA) degrees last 3 years while postgraduate (master’s or MA) degrees last 1 year, full-time.
- Beware that unlike in America, ‘college’ in the UK refers to ‘Sixth Form’ or the two years before a domestic student traditionally goes to university. ‘School’ refers to education prior to sixth form or college.
- The academic year begins in September/October and usually concludes in May/June.
- You will be required to meet a certain standard of English proficiency. Most institutions in the UK will require you to have an IELTS score of 6.0 (approx.) to study there (though you should always confirm this with the university themselves).
- Course fees will vary depending on whether you are an EU or non-EU student, as well as on university, study level and course. EU students will pay the same as domestic UK students; this will be around £8,000-£9,000 per year for undergraduate fees, and postgraduate fees are around £6,000. For Non-EU students, annual fees are higher, at £10,000-£13,000 for undergraduate and postgraduate. However, note that Medical and Law degrees are normally substantially more expensive, while the higher-ranking universities will have higher fees too.
- We recommend researching your study abroad options at least two years prior to when you plan to begin studying. You should always confirm the exact deadlines for applications with that institution. For a rough guide, EU applicant deadlines will be in January, while non-EU applicant deadlines will be in June. Higher rankings institutions will have earlier deadlines, as will Law and Medicine courses.

EXPLORE FURTHER

- The Higher Education System in the UK...Simplified
- Tuition Fees in the UK
- Start searching for a course, university or scholarship in the UK
APPLYING TO A BRITISH UNIVERSITY
International students should apply through UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Application Service); this is the online application service which domestic students apply through as well.

**PERSONAL ESSAY**

The personal essay part of your application will require you to demonstrate a passion for the field you are applying to, usually by answering a few questions with mini essay-style answers. You should use relevant real-life examples which have contributed to your current knowledge or interest; these can include personal endeavours, volunteering and work experience.

However, do not simply talk about your love for the course. Talk about why you want to study that course at that particular university. This will require researching that area, university or department.

*TIP:* Remember that an admissions officer will be reading hundreds of applications so you need to do something which makes you stand out. You can show some personality to distinguish yourself, but keep the tone of your application formal and professional.

**ACADEMIC RECORDS**

You will need to provide evidence of your academic records so far so the university can evaluate whether you meet the requirements of the course you are applying to. This may involve getting these translated by an accredited translator.

*TIP:* Anything you can do to make the admissions officer’s job easier will be much appreciated by them. The number one problem for admissions officers is an incomplete application, so ensure you have provided all the information which is asked of you. Doing so will ensure a quicker response to your application.

**ADMISSIONS TESTS**

There are several admissions tests in the UK to study specific fields, while the most elite institutions (like Oxford and Cambridge) will require you to take their own admissions tests to study there. For example, Law applicants may be required to take the LNAT, while those who wish to study Law at Cambridge must take the Cambridge Law Test.

You should check which tests you will be required to take for entry to the institution you are interested in.

**LANGUAGE TESTS**

You will need to show that you are proficient in English to a certain standard to study in the UK. This is evaluated through an English language test which you can take in your own country at a test centre. The most common English language tests are IELTS and TOEFL which are widely accepted.

Different universities will have slightly varying language test score requirements or accept certain language tests only. Certain subjects will also require slightly higher overall scores or higher scores in particular areas of these language tests; these are usually Law, Medicine and Journalism, where strong English language skills are key to course material. Normally, the required minimum IELTS score for undergraduate study will be a 6.5 or a TOEFL score of around 80. Required scores to study at postgraduate level may likely be slightly higher given the step-up in course material.
However, always confirm this with your university before booking your test so you can prepare accordingly. If you can choose, you should also consider the language test which suits your strengths.

**DOCUMENTS CHECKLIST**
As part of your application to a British university, you will need to provide several documents. Ensure you have access to the following (providing either originals or translated copies where appropriate):

- A valid passport (valid 6 months after your course completion date)
- Evidence of how you expect to fund your studies and lifestyle e.g. notifications of scholarships and bursaries, bank statements (yours or your parents/guardians) etc.
- A passport-sized photo of you (it’s good to have a few of these when applying to study abroad – you never know when they’ll come in handy)
- Academic transcripts with grades achieved
- Transcripts with scores from admissions and language tests
- Resume or CV (sometimes)
- Reference or recommendation letter x 2 (at least one being an academic reference)

**INTERVIEWS**
On some occasions international applicants will be interviewed by the institution they are applying to before a decision can be made regarding their admission. Do not worry if this occurs; this is normal and simply means that they want to learn more about you.

Interviews can be conducted in person in your country by a university representative who will report back to the admissions team at the university. Interviews may also be conducted over the phone or via Skype/Google Hangout.

These interviews are normally rather brief. You can expect to answer questions about why you want to study the course you’re applying to, as well as some other questions about your interests and goals in life.

**Tip:** Focus on the education aspect of studying abroad, rather than the immigration aspect. Seeming more focused on living in the UK than actually studying in the country is not a good message to send.

**EXPLORE FURTHER**
- Applying to Study in the UK
- Writing Your Personal Statement
- The International English Language Testing System (IELTS)
- IELTS vs. TOEFL
- Application Checklist: Essential Documents
- Phone (& Skype) Interviews: Dos and Don’ts
- Start searching for a course, university or scholarship in the UK
APPLYING FOR A UK STUDENT VISA
International students will need to obtain the correct UK student visa before arriving in the UK. Without this, they won’t be allowed to enter the country.

Like with tuition fees, your route to obtaining a student visa will depend on your nationality. No matter what, you MUST have a valid passport. If you don’t already have one, we suggest applying for this while you are applying to universities to save time – this process can take time.

IF YOU ARE AN EEA NATIONAL (OR FROM SWITZERLAND)...

You do not need a student visa to study in the UK. However after three months, you will have to be enrolled to study at an institution. You can also work in the UK, though you will have to show your employer your passport, visa or identity card to verify this.

IF YOU ARE NOT AN EEA NATIONAL (AND NOT FROM SWITZERLAND)...

You will need to apply for a student visa. This will likely be a Tier 4 (Adult) visa (for those 16 years and older who intend to study for 6 months or longer).

You should start applying as soon as you are made an offer by a university.

You can apply through the official government website online www.gov.uk (Note: if you’re from Zimbabwe, North Korea or Cuba you must apply in person in your country).

There is a visa processing fee of £289.

There are working restrictions for those on a Tier 4 visa such as how many hours you can work per week – always check these on your passport sticker or visa.

YOUR INTERVIEW

Most applicants for the Tier 4 Adult visa will be required to attend an interview in their home country at a visa application centre. Here a Home Office staff member will ask you a few questions about your plans to study in the UK. Be honest and don’t be too nervous.

When you attend your interview, it is best to take the following documents with you (these are the essential documents required for applying for a student visa, so check that you have access to these):

- A valid passport (valid 6 months after your course completion date)
- Evidence of how you expect to fund your studies and lifestyle e.g. notifications of scholarships and bursaries, bank statements (yours or your parents/guardians) etc.
- A passport-sized photo of you (it’s good to have a few of these when applying to study abroad – you never know when they’ll come in handy)
- Letter from your institution confirming your acceptance/enrolment
- Academic transcripts with grades achieved
- Transcripts with scores from admissions and language tests

You should also bring these with you when you arrive in the country.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Applying For a UK Student Visa

Start searching for a course, university or scholarship in the UK.
STUDENT ACCOMMODATION IN THE UK
In the UK, most students in their first year live on campus (especially for undergraduate students). Then, from their second year on, they live off-campus in the surrounding area.

**YOUR FIRST YEAR**

Nearly all international students will be guaranteed accommodation on campus in one of their university’s residence halls.

**What is a residence hall?** - This is a building comprised of single rooms, sometimes separated further into flats with a shared kitchen and social space (other times, there will be a kitchen and bathroom facilities shared amongst 4-10 students). You can indicate to the university some preferences for the type of person you would like to live with, which they will try to meet.

**How to choose accommodation?** - Once you have accepted a university’s offer, they will send you all the information about their accommodation options available. There will often be guides with images and virtual tours available on their website, which you can browse from your own country. Consider your budget for rent and living expenses as halls will vary in price depending on amenities (e.g. food plan or self-catered) and facilities. You will then have to indicate which halls are your preferred choices through an online application.

**What furniture will be included?** - Usually you will be provided with a desk, chair, bed, chest of drawers and wardrobe. You will have to buy additional items like a desk-light, extra storage, kitchenware and bed linen once you arrive.

**What support is available?** - Most universities have on-campus security of some form, while residence halls will have staff on site. Sometimes these will be 2nd and 3rd year students who have been trained to deal with any issues that may arise. If you are really not enjoying your living arrangements, you can ask to switch (though this will depend on what spaces are available).

**SUBSEQUENT YEARS**

After your first year, you will have to seek out off-campus accommodation. The good news is that having lived in the UK for a whole year, you will be more comfortable and have made many new friends, some of whom you would like to live with. Most choose to find a flat or houseshare with other students using sites like Gumtree, or by looking in a local newspaper. Your university’s accommodation office will also be able to put you in touch with reputable agencies and landlords who’ve housed students locally before.

You should consider some of the following factors when finding off-campus accommodation:

**Budget** - What can you afford for rent/utility bills per month?

**Getting to campus** - Are there good public transport links or can you walk/cycle in?

**Choosing a location** - Are you close to shops, friends and things to do?

**Safety** - Do you feel safe in the neighbourhood?

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**EXPLORE FURTHER**

Student Accommodation in the UK
Start searching for a course, university or scholarship in the UK
SUPPORTING YOURSELF FINANCIALLY
As mentioned in the previous chapter, you will need to show that you have sufficient funds to pay your course fees and support yourself. This is a requirement for studying in the UK.

Here are a few things which can help you financially before arriving and once you are studying...

**BEFORE ARRIVING**

**Scholarships**
Scholarships are widely available for international students but you need to search for them online. These can be awarded by your government (or the UK government), the university themselves or third-parties. Scholarships are awarded to those who show exceptional academic merit, and can be based on excellent grades achieved so far, as well as potential in the future. Applicants will have to apply for scholarships, arguing why they deserve the award and what it would mean to their future. Scholarships and other financial aid will have requirements and deadlines, so be aware of these!

**Family**
Speak to your family about possible financial support they can offer you. You should do this well in advance of when you plan to apply. This way, your family have enough time to calculate what they can provide you and make any necessary lifestyle changes for this.

**ONCE YOU ARRIVE**

**Part-Time Work**
According to the terms of the Tier 4 student visa, international students can work for up to 20 hours per week during term-time, and longer outside of this. There are numerous job opportunities for international students, especially in large cities like London and Manchester. These can include working in retail shops or restaurants and bars.

**On Campus**
There are roles available on campus supporting staff and students which are more academic in nature (especially beneficial for your CV). Research assistantships are normally available to PhD students, to support professors with their own work. Meanwhile, you can help in the International Office of your university, or students studying the same field as you with their studies (though this may depend on your English proficiency).

**Living Costs**
There are many ways to save money while living in the UK and this all depends on lifestyle. By showing your student I.D. you can receive discounts in retail shops, restaurants and cinemas. You can also save 1/3rd on train fares with a 16-25 railcard which you can buy for 1 or 3 years. Look around and ask others for good deals on everything, from phone tariffs to accommodation (it’s also a good conversation topic). Cook meals at home rather than eat out. Be prepared for rent and living costs to be higher in London.

**EXPLORE FURTHER**
- Living Costs in the UK
- Scholarships in the UK
- Browse scholarships in the UK
- Start searching for a course, university or scholarship in the UK
LIFE IN BRITAIN
CULTURE
While there is an outdated perception of the British being stuck up or repressed, the Brits are some of the most jovial people you can expect to meet. The British sense of humour can be incredibly dry at times, so don’t be alarmed by this if humour is expressed in a straight-faced, dead-pan fashion. Before you go, watch some Monty Python or Fawlty Towers clips on YouTube to get a sense of their humour.

SOCIALISING
You’ll see this British humour in full force in pubs and bars up and down the country, amongst friends enjoying a drink. “Pub culture” is popular in the UK (the legal drinking age is 18 years old), but this doesn’t necessarily mean getting drunk. The great British pub is a staple of the local community, where everyone catches up with one another and has a laugh. However, you shouldn’t feel like you have to drink alcohol or go to noisy clubs to fit in.

While UK universities don’t have the Greek house system found in the US, there are numerous societies and clubs to join on campus. These can either be serious (e.g. politics societies) or more fun (e.g. anime or heavy metal societies).

TRY AT LEAST ONCE...
Food
A British tradition on weekends is a Sunday Roast Dinner. A time in the week to sit down and catch up with family and friends, a traditional Roast will consist of either beef or lamb with gravy, roast potatoes, Yorkshire puddings and vegetables. While you’ll find most pubs and restaurants serving roast dinners on a Sunday, it’s more fun to cook your own with a group.

Drink
Tea is an institution in Britain. Even the worst day can be soothed with “a cuppa”. If you’re not a tea drinker already, you soon will be. If you want to do something special, visit a tea room and enjoy a sophisticated afternoon tea party with crumpets and cake, with a close friend.

Place
Luckily the UK has an extensive rail network connecting all corners of the country. We recommend taking at least one trip to the seaside if you aren’t already studying near the coast. For example, Brighton is just an hour away from London. Thousands spontaneously flock to the coast whenever the sun is out, to make the most of the gorgeous weather! Many seaside towns in the UK are small, quaint and peaceful, but still offer plenty to do. As well as relaxing on the beach, you can visit some historical sites and play in the arcades on the pier. British seaside culture is unique, with a cheeky or bawdy sense of humour, evident in the classic postcards you can buy in the shops or the performers you come across. Before you leave, make sure you buy a stick of seaside rock candy for the journey home.

ACTIVITY
Seeing a Shakespeare play performed live on stage is a real treat. Reading it on paper at school really doesn’t do a great work like A Midsummer Night’s Dream or Twelfth Night justice. Performed live, you can see all the nuances in the original material and every production is different depending on the production and individuals involved. The exquisite theatres which house these performances are steeped in history and are a sight to behold on their own too.

EXPLORE FURTHER
What British Foods and Cuisines Should You Try? [VIDEO]
What Are the Differences Between Britain and America? [VIDEO]
Start searching for a course, university or scholarship in the UK
BEFORE YOU LEAVE
Wait! Before you set off to begin your new future in the UK, you need to make sure that you have remembered everything you’ll need for when you arrive. This will mean your first few hours or days in your study abroad destination are as straightforward and hassle-free as possible. So check that you have the following organised before you get on the plane....

Have you opened a bank account? You can open a bank account before or once you arrive. Just make sure that you have access to enough money for your first few days/weeks in the country. Every bank has their own set of incentives but study the fine terms for each carefully.

What to pack? This will depend on where you are studying. If you’re arriving in the autumn (September/October), most areas will be getting colder, so pack warm jumpers, jackets and boots. In fact, these will come in handy throughout the year.

Have you got all essential documents? We suggest having a (hard copy) “Study Abroad” folder from when you begin applying, to keep all documents you’ve received and will need, and bring this with you. If you rely on electronic copies, you risk your device not working when trying to access them (you can always back these up electronically, as well as keeping copies at home). These documents will include:

- Passport
- Student visa documents
- Confirmation of enrolment or offer from the university
- University (and accommodation) contact information
- Notifications of financial awards
- Academic and language test transcripts
- Flight tickets and itinerary

Who will meet you once you arrive? Let the university know when you intend to arrive so they can prepare for you. Take down a contact phone number of a relevant staff member (i.e. someone in the International Office) you can reach if you need assistance. Will someone from the university meet you at the airport, or will you have to make your own way to your accommodation/university?

Check before leaving home! You have your passport, flight tickets and device chargers, yes?
WHAT NOW?
LETS TAKE THE NEXT STEP TOGETHER...

We don't want to leave you alone to figure out the rest. We have lots more to offer you at Hotcourses Abroad. Visit our site and you can do the following:

**Search for and compare courses**
You can search for and compare courses in the most popular study destinations in the world. You can search quickly according to your preferences including subject, study level, country and study mode; that way you find the course that is perfect for you.

**Search for scholarships**
We offer a scholarship search facility to help you find a scholarship to make your study abroad dreams a reality.

**Connect with a university**
Rather than wait for a heavy, print prospectus to arrive in the post, you can download full prospectuses to your device to access wherever you go. You can also ask a university a question, as well as click through to their site directly from their profile if what you read about them interests you.

**Read student reviews**
Find out what other international students think of a university you’re considering, by reading student reviews on our site. As well as scores for several key categories, you can read their comments and advice.

**Read articles and study guides**
Our study guides and articles will guide you through each step of the study abroad journey, from research and applying, to student visas and preparing to leave. These are written by and collaborated on with current international students & graduates, professors, university staff and other experts; this way you know you’re getting the correct advice, laid out in an easy-to-understand manner.

Explore Hotcourses Abroad now and become a member!

Good luck,
The Hotcourses Abroad Team

Oh, one last thing....
Be a wonderful friend and share this eBook with those you know who are also interested in studying abroad.

WHO ARE WE?
Hotcourses Abroad is a part of the Hotcourses network of websites. As well as International Education (which is made up of Hotcourses Abroad and our local language sites), we have sites which cover Higher Education and Adult Learning in our main home of the UK, where we began nearly 20 years ago. Hotcourses is a global brand with offices in Sydney (Australia), Boston (USA) and Chennai (India), populated by a diverse and truly international team.

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