



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

Education UK is managed by  **BRITISH COUNCIL**

British Council  
Bridgewater House, 58 Whitworth Street  
Manchester M1 6BB

[educationuk@britishcouncil.org](mailto:educationuk@britishcouncil.org)  
[www.educationuk.org](http://www.educationuk.org)

© **British Council 2011** Brand and Design/ B154/B

The British Council creates international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and builds trust between them worldwide.

A registered charity: 209131 (England and Wales) SC037733 (Scotland).



# Creating confidence

Making sure that your  
time in the UK is safe  
and enjoyable

[www.educationuk.org](http://www.educationuk.org)



*“Safety talk was very good and has made me understand how living in the UK can be really nice if you stick to the rules.”*

*“I attended the briefing and it was very useful to learn how to react in emergencies.”*

*“I generally feel the UK is safer than my country.”*



# Contents

Welcome to the UK	3
Arriving in the UK	4
Meet the police	6
Protecting your identity	8
Taking out insurance	8
Looking after your belongings	9
Finding private accommodation	10
Safety at home	12
Safety on the streets	16
Using public transport	18
Using taxis	19
Driving in the UK	20
Cycling in the UK	23
Laws in the UK	24
Powers of arrest	24
Racial discrimination and harassment	26
Hate crime	27
Useful helplines and websites	28



A photograph of two young women walking through a crowd. The woman on the left is wearing a black coat and glasses, smiling. The woman on the right is wearing a bright red puffer jacket and glasses, also smiling. The background is filled with other people, some out of focus, suggesting a busy public event or airport. The lighting is bright, likely from the sun.

We hope that the time you spend studying in the UK will be an enjoyable and rewarding experience, but, here as with anywhere, it pays to be aware of your personal safety. What follows is a simple everyday guide to looking after yourself and staying safe and secure.



## Welcome to the UK

For many of you this may be your first time living away from home in an unfamiliar country. This guide is designed to help you prepare for your stay here and give you practical advice about living and studying in the UK.

It highlights some of the safety and security issues you may need to be aware of, offers sensible advice, and lists organisations to contact if you do need help.

You may feel you are being bombarded with information throughout your induction programme. You may be under time pressures with your studies and fail to attend any safety briefings offered. Safety and security issues require a level of attention in the early stages and should not be abandoned when you become more familiar with life in the UK. This guide could and should be read and referred to throughout your stay here.

By international standards, the UK is a safe country, with low levels of violence and street crime. In a recent survey (*Creating confidence – International student safety survey 2010*) by the British Council, only a very small proportion of students had ever experienced a crime and the overwhelming majority felt that the UK is a very safe place to be.

The fear of crime does not resemble the actuality of crime itself. The suggestions in this guide can help you adopt sensible strategies intended to minimise the possibility of you becoming a victim. The booklet can be used to help you devise a strategy plan – a plan to avoid being a victim of crime in

everything you do. It will help you anticipate and recognise a risk and to take action to remove or avoid that risk.

A lot of the advice we offer may seem common sense, but it can make a real difference in keeping you, your family if they are here with you, your accommodation and belongings safe and secure.

We want you to feel comfortable and at home, and everyone involved – the British Council, the UK Border Agency, the National Union of Students, and the police – is working together to exchange knowledge, keep up to date with crime trends, legislation and other safety issues to help protect you and other students against crime.

Staff at your institution are there to help you take care of yourself and settle happily into your local community, and usually they, community police officers or campus security staff will give you practical advice about personal safety.

By taking note of the suggestions offered in any safety talk provided by your institution when you first arrive and by reading and re-reading this guide during your entire stay (and insuring your belongings when you first arrive), we hope that you will keep safe, feel more secure and free to enjoy your time in the UK.

**Helen Clews**  
British Council



## Arriving in the UK

In the excitement of arriving in any new country, it can be easy to get distracted and misplace things, especially as you get on and off planes, trains and coaches. Here are some practical reminders to help you when you first arrive in the UK.

- Take special care of your passport, travel documents and tickets and keep them with you in a safe place. Before you travel, take a photocopy of all the pages of your passport (including the front and back cover) showing your details (name, photograph, passport number and its date and place of issue) and all the pages that have any entry clearances or immigration stamps on them, and pack this separately from your passport. If you do lose your passport contact the police and your Embassy immediately and give them your passport details.
- Bring enough cash to cover your immediate needs (about £250). Bring a credit card, if you have one, to pay for things such as rail tickets and hotel bills. If possible, your cash should include some coins so that you can use public telephones and ticket machines, and some small denomination bank notes (£5 and £10).
- Cash, credit cards and travellers' cheques should be carried in a safe place, such as an inside pocket, a money belt or a zipped bag. Make a note of the serial numbers of your travellers' cheques and pack this separately from the cheques themselves. Keep your travellers' cheques separate from your passport. If you lose your travellers' cheques or credit card, report the loss to the police and the issuing organisation immediately.
- Keep the telephone number of your school, college or university handy, in case you need to call for advice or tell them about a change in your plans.
- Label your luggage clearly so that it can be forwarded to you if it gets separated from you during the journey. If you do lose your luggage, report the loss immediately to officials of the airline or shipping line. At airports or seaports, check the lost property office to see whether it has been handed in there.

- If you need to leave your luggage somewhere while you change money or make telephone calls, use an official left luggage office (available at airports and at major rail and coach stations). Then, for a small fee, you will be able to leave your luggage in a safe and supervised area. The attendant will give you a receipt so that you can collect your items later.
- If you are using a taxi, always make sure that you use a licensed one. Before you get in, you can check whether the taxi is licensed by looking at the back of it to ensure an official licence plate is attached. You should never agree to travel in an unlicensed taxi with an unlicensed driver.
- From airports, you can travel safely in one of the UK's famous 'black cabs'. Never agree to travel with someone who approaches you inside the terminal building, unless you have made a specific arrangement to be met by a 'minicab' company.



## Meet the police

The police in the UK are friendly and helpful. They have a duty to protect everyone and can always be safely approached. They are committed to promoting crime prevention and work in partnership with educational institutions, their student bodies, their staff and students to promote and reinforce student safety messages.

### **Registering your stay**

Some international students will need to register their stay with the police within seven days of their arrival in the UK. The stamp in your passport will tell you whether or not you should register. Many universities and institutions help by organising registration sessions on campus.

In a recent International students safety survey (*Creating confidence 2010*) international students said that registering their stay with the police enhanced their feelings of safety while studying in the UK. They commented that it added extra protection, monitoring and a good example of central record keeping in an event of an emergency.

If your institution doesn't provide any help and you need to register, you should take a letter from your institution confirming that you are studying there, what course you are studying, proof of your address, your passport, two photographs and a £34 registration fee to a local police station or, if you are studying in London, to the Overseas Visitors' Records Office (telephone 020 7230 1208).

In the unlikely event that you do have anything stolen, or are assaulted, followed or threatened, you can contact the police who will always encourage you to report the incident. You should always report a crime even if you feel there is nothing the police can do. If you have lost money or property you will be given a crime reference number, which you will need to make any claim on insurance. Do not worry about language difficulties, as the police will find someone, free of charge, who speaks your language.

Alternatively, you can ask your tutor, welfare officer, your host family, security on campus or someone you can trust to contact the police on your behalf or you can even do it anonymously.

Your local police station will provide helpful advice about crime prevention and a home security assessment, if required. They will also provide a certificate if you need to make an insurance claim for a theft.

### **In an emergency**

In an emergency, where there is a danger to life or a crime is in progress, you can contact the police, fire brigade or ambulance by dialling 999 from any telephone. This call is free of charge, but should be used only in an emergency.

### How to report a crime

If you do witness a crime, or are a victim yourself, it is very important to report it. By reporting a crime you will make sure you get the appropriate support and you will be helping the police and security to tackle crime and make your local area safer.

To report a non-emergency minor crime, just call your local police station – you can find their number in the telephone directory – or, as we mentioned before, you can ask someone you know and trust to make the call for you.

The charity Crimestoppers operates a service using the number 0800 555 111, which allows people to telephone anonymously with information about criminals or crimes. The information is then passed on to the police. Just tell them what you know, not who you are.





## Protecting your identity

Your identity and personal information are valuable. If criminals find out your personal details, they can use them to open bank accounts and obtain credit cards, loans and documents, such as passports, in your name.

The website [www.identitytheft.org.uk](http://www.identitytheft.org.uk) can help you to protect yourself against this happening. It advises you what to do if it does happen and suggests where to get further help.

Action Fraud also provides anti-fraud guidance and is the first point of contact for individuals reporting fraud. Call 0300 123 2040.

Students are also risking being burgled by giving away their whereabouts on social networking sites. These sites and the easy availability of addresses on the internet can be used to create a list of targets.

## Taking out insurance

It is essential that you take out insurance when you arrive in the UK to cover your belongings against theft, or accidental damage. It may be advisable to take out medical insurance. There are policies especially designed for international students studying in the UK and will protect your possessions and health costs. If you are thinking of driving in the UK you must insure a car before you drive it. You can find insurance information on most college and university campuses or you can consult your students' union or bank.

For general advice on insurance and a full list of insurance brokers, contact the Association of British Insurers at [www.abi.org.uk](http://www.abi.org.uk)



## Looking after your belongings

- When moving into new accommodation, don't leave luggage or belongings outside or in the open trunk/boot of a car or taxi.
- Use an ultraviolet pen to mark your valuables with the name of your school, college or university, your name and student ID number (see your students' union office for details). This will enable the police to return them if stolen and recovered.
- Ask your school or college if they provide safe storage, or consider purchasing a small personal safe to keep your passport, travellers' cheques, wallet, purse and other valuables locked away.
- Keep your windows, curtains and window blinds closed at night and make sure your laptop, television, DVD player and other valuables can't be seen through a window, and never leave cash or credit cards lying around.
- Make use of inexpensive light timers to give an illusion of occupancy.
- Make a list of your possessions, including make, model and serial numbers for reference and ideally, keep photographic records of valuables.
- If you go away on holiday, cancel any newspaper or milk subscriptions, and try to leave your valuables in storage (many educational institutions have a secure storage room) or with a trusted friend.
- If you have a bicycle, always lock it up when you're not using it, by connecting its frame and wheel to a fixed object with a good-quality 'D' lock (available from [www.soldsecure.com](http://www.soldsecure.com)). Mark it with your postcode, so the police can return it if it is stolen and recovered.
- Try not to use a computer case when carrying a laptop. Use a less obvious bag to carry it in and think carefully before you use your laptop in crowded places. Always back up your work and keep it separate from your laptop.
- Also avoid displaying other expensive items, such as watches, jewellery, iPod earphones or mobile phones, in busy public places.
- Register your most valued possessions including your mobile phone, bicycles, and laptops, free of charge, with Immobilise Phone Crime ([www.immobilise.com](http://www.immobilise.com)). If an item is stolen, call 08701 123 123. You will need to have your IMEI number (15 digit serial number) when reporting a stolen mobile phone – this can be found by dialling \*#06# on most mobiles or by looking behind the phone battery. You should keep a note of your IMEI number in a safe place in case it is required. Never leave your mobile phone unattended.

## Finding private accommodation

It is important for you to have suitable, safe accommodation while you are studying in the UK. Start making arrangements as soon as you have been accepted on your course. This is especially important if you are planning to bring your family with you.

Make sure that you arrange some form of accommodation before you arrive in the UK, even if it is only temporary. Contact the student officer at your Embassy or High Commission before you leave your home country – they may be able to give you advice and information.

You can get information about accommodation owned by private landlords from [www.saferstudents.co.uk](http://www.saferstudents.co.uk) and from the accommodation office at your institution. Contact them as soon as you are accepted on your course to find out what is available. Institutions, as well as some private landlords, have invested significantly in security measures. These include security surveillance, presence of security staff, police patrols, use of identity cards at institutions and safety talks offered at institutions.

Here are some tips to help you find safe, private accommodation:

- Ask the accommodation office at your institution, the welfare office or the students' union for help and advice. They may have lists of local accommodation to rent and may also have inspected it to check it is suitable. They may also be able to help if you have any problems.
- Check whether the accommodation you are going to see is in a safe area before you go. Write or email your local police and ask them about local crime spots and if there have been any police visits, disturbances or any anti-social behaviour orders in the area you are going to, and also if the property you are viewing has ever been burgled.



© James Glossop / British Council

- You can also find out about crime statistics in the area in which you are planning to live by looking at [www.crime-statistics.co.uk](http://www.crime-statistics.co.uk)  
See also [www.findaproperty.com](http://www.findaproperty.com)  
and [www.homecheck.com](http://www.homecheck.com)

- The world's first nationwide street-by-street crime maps went online in February 2010. The maps show what crimes have been committed each month on every street in England and Wales. Research published by the National Policing Improvement Agency shows that web-based crime maps do not fuel the fear of crime. The maps, which are accessible by typing a postcode into the [www.police.uk](http://www.police.uk) website, also provide contact details for neighbourhood policing teams, CCTV footage of local incidents, and in some cases even a Twitter feed from beat officers.

- If possible, take someone with you when viewing accommodation. If you are alone, leave the address you are going to, and your expected time of return, with a friend or colleague. Consider how far you will have to walk to and from public transport or your own private transport. View the neighbourhood both by day and by night.

- Find out exactly who might have access to the accommodation apart from yourself, and check if the windows and doors have good locks and bolts and an alarm.

- Be businesslike in your dealings with prospective landlords or landladies. You have different rights depending on what kind of tenancy agreement you have. It is worth asking the landlady or landlord about any disputes and what the neighbours are like. Check the tenancy with staff at your institution before signing. The website [www.primelocation.com](http://www.primelocation.com) has buying, selling and rating guides.

- If you feel uncomfortable with anyone who is showing you accommodation, mention that friends know where you are and are expecting your return at a certain time.

You can get more useful advice about finding student accommodation in the UK at [www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk)





© James Glossop / British Council

## Safety at home

Approximately 20 per cent of burglars don't have to force entry. Most burglaries are committed during the day and access is usually through an open door or window. Burglary rises approximately 23 per cent during the winter months. Deterring would-be criminals is one of the most effective forms of crime prevention.

- Speak to your local crime prevention officer at your local police station. He or she will come round and advise you on how to make your home more secure.
- If you move into a new home, change the front and back door locks immediately, as other people may have keys that fit. If you lose or have your keys stolen, replace the locks as a safety precaution.
- Hardware and DIY shops sell inexpensive key-operated locks to fit most kinds of windows. Remember to lock all outside windows and doors even when you are at home. Consider using or purchasing a safety chain, spy hole or intercom for your front door.
- If leaving windows open at night always fit a window limiter to prevent it being opened further.
- If you are female and live in a flat with a door-entry system do not put 'Miss', 'Mrs', or 'Ms' in front of your name; just use your family name. If in doubt about a visitor, do not let him or her in.

- Check the identity of any unknown caller by calling the company they say they are from. If you are not sure who is at your door don't open it and let them in.
- If you live in a flat or a house with an outside light and/or a burglar alarm, make sure you use them. If the alarm can be set to cover zoned areas, set the alarm downstairs when you go to bed.
- Every home should have at least one smoke alarm, preferably two, which should be tested regularly. These can be bought very cheaply from hardware shops and other high street retailers.
- If you have a telephone-answering machine, don't record a message saying: 'I am not available', as this reveals to the caller that you are a single occupant. It is better to say: 'No one is available to take your call.'
- If you ever receive obscene or threatening telephone calls or notes, tell a member of staff at your institution or the police.
- If you live in a shared house, don't assume there is someone else in who will make it secure when you go out. Discuss security rules and make sure you all agree to leave the house secure at all times.
- Check the identity of any unknown caller by calling the company they say they are from. If you are not sure who is at your door don't open it and let them in.
- Try to make access around the back of the house difficult for unwanted visitors, and try and keep the front of the house clear and visible, so unwanted visitors don't have somewhere to hide.
- If you are going away, tell someone you trust where you are going and when you will be back.
- Don't leave spare keys outside or in a garage or shed for burglars to find. Garages and sheds are often targets for burglars looking for tools so make sure they are locked. Make sure there is no access to tools or ladders that could be used to force entry into your home. Keep house and car keys separate and out of sight in the house.
- Leave keys in a safe place where you can find them easily in case you need to leave in a hurry, but don't keep them in sight near doors or windows.
- If you are leaving the house empty, ask a friend or neighbour to open and close your curtains or blinds in the mornings and evenings. Use a time-switch for your lights and radios to make it appear as if there is someone in. These can be bought from hardware shops and other high street retailers.



- Keep keys in a pocket rather than in a bag, then if the bag is stolen you can still get into your house. Try to avoid having your keys and your address in your bag at the same time.
- Ideally, if you have lost a key or just moved into a new property, change the locks. Check your insurance policy as new locks may be covered. Highlight the fact that your possessions are security marked and registered to immobilise using window stickers.
- Good security will reduce the chance of your home being burgled. But just in case it happens, think about how you would deal with the situation. Many people now have a telephone in their bedroom, but even if you do, take your mobile to bed with you. In the unlikely event that someone breaks in, you can use it to dial 999 even if your normal phone is too far away or has been disconnected by the intruder.
- If you arrive home and do see signs of a break-in – smashed windows or open doors – don't go in. Go to a friend or neighbour's house and call the police. Do not touch anything when you do go back in, as you could destroy valuable evidence.

#### **Electric and gas fires, heaters and cookers**

- If you have gas cookers, fires and/or heaters in your accommodation, you should get an audible carbon monoxide alarm which complies with BS EN 5029. These can be bought in hardware shops or DIY stores.

Make sure gas appliances are checked every year by an engineer who is registered with the Gas Safe Register (formerly CORGI). More advice can be found at [www.hse.gov.uk/gas/gas-safe-register-campaign.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/gas-safe-register-campaign.htm).

- If you live in rented accommodation, ask your landlord or landlady to have cookers, fires and heaters checked. They are required by law to show you the most recent safety certificate.
- Whenever you go out, turn off gas and electrical appliances, such as the cooker, television and iron (but not the refrigerator).

#### **Fire safety in the home**

The Fire and Rescue Service is not there to just respond when the worst happens. They are also there to offer support and advice to help prevent fires from happening in the first place. If you would like more advice visit or call your local fire station.

- Plan your easiest escape route. Make sure everyone is familiar with that route and always have a back-up route just in case that one is blocked.
- Fit a smoke alarm and test it regularly, on a weekly basis. Smoke alarms save lives. They alert you to the danger of fire, giving you precious time to escape. They are cheap, easy to find and to fit. You should have at least one on each floor, particularly in the kitchen, and perhaps above electrical appliances.

- Check all electrical appliances frequently. Fires in the home often start with a household appliance. That's why it is so important to check them for any signs that they have become a potential hazard. Use the correct fuses to prevent them overheating and don't overload adaptors. Keep appliances clean and replace any worn or old cables. Unplugging appliances while you are sleeping at night or when you leave the house can reduce the risk of fire. Make sure all your furniture carries the fire-resistant label.
- Close all internal doors, especially at night or when you are out.
- Take extra care around your home. Most fires are preventable. The most common causes of fire in the home include: not cooking safely; smoking and cigarette accidents; appliances setting alight; careless use of candles, portable heaters and electric blankets. Tips on how to avoid these causes of fire in the home are available at [www.fireservice.co.uk/safety](http://www.fireservice.co.uk/safety)

In the event of fire:

- Close all doors to prevent fire spreading. A closed door can stop a fire spreading and give you extra time to get out.
- If you can, leave the house and call 999 at the first sign of fire. Stay out of the house. Remember to keep calm, act quickly and follow your escape route. If your home is filled with smoke, remember to stay low where the air

is clearer. Before you open any doors, check to see if they feel warm. If any door feels warm, do not enter as the fire could be burning behind it. Leave it closed and exit another way.

- If you cannot get out, move into one room – make sure it has a window – and close the door. Try to take your phone with you and call 999. Use anything in the room to block the smoke from coming under the door. Open the window and shout 'Help, fire!' Fire crews will then be able to rescue you.
- If your clothes catch on fire, remember – stop, drop and roll. Do not run about – just keep still, lie down and roll to put the flames out.

Remember you can call your local fire station and ask them to visit your home and give you a free Home Safety Assessment. The Fire and Rescue Service are committed to helping people to be more aware of the steps they can take to avoid the danger of fire.

#### How to report a gas leak

If you smell gas anywhere, either in the house or in the street, call the freephone gas service emergency number on 0800 111 999. If it is in your own house and it is safe to do so, turn off the gas supply and open the windows and doors.



## Safety on the streets

Recent research suggests it is safe to walk on the streets in the UK, although you should always be aware of your surroundings and use your common sense wherever you are. The suggestions that follow are not intended to alarm but to remind you to always be alert on the streets of the UK as you would in your own country.

- When you first move into your accommodation, find suitable and safe routes to petrol stations, shops and public telephones. Try to find routes that are well lit and busy.
- Walk confidently on the pavement, facing oncoming traffic. When crossing the road, remember that vehicles drive on the left in the UK, so they will be coming towards you from the right.
- If you are returning home late at night, walk in a group or use public transport. Avoid putting yourself at risk by taking shortcuts, for example, through dark alleyways or parks.
- Don't carry large amounts of cash with you when you are out.
- Always keep your bag and coat or jacket with you, and don't leave them on a chair or out of sight.
- Make sure you carry a mobile phone with you or enough change or a telephone card, so you can make a phone call or call a taxi, should you need one.
- A new text service that transforms your mobile phone into a personal safety alarm is available from as little as £1.99 a month. Users can also choose a pay-as-you-go option. The system allows users to alert friends or family if they get into trouble. Text alarms can be set in advance – for example if a person fails to get home at a particular time. Or users can speed dial the panic number to trigger an alarm if they get into trouble. Once the alarm is triggered, Text You Home obtains the location of the user from the network triangulation to pinpoint the mobile. The location is then texted to emergency contacts, such as family or friends, along with any journey details sent by the user beforehand. More details are available on [www.textyouhome.com](http://www.textyouhome.com)
- Be alert and be brief when using a mobile phone. Be discreet and try to conceal it. Don't wander along with your iPod earphones on.
- When using a public telephone, face outwards, so that you can see what's going on around you.
- If you feel that you are being followed, cross the street (more than once if necessary), and if you are still unhappy, move as quickly as possible to a public area, such as a restaurant or bar, and telephone for help. It is not necessarily the best idea to use the first telephone that you see if it is in an isolated spot.

- Don't accept drinks from strangers or leave your drink unattended in public places as 'spiking' drinks with drugs or alcohol is on the increase.
- Think about buying a personal attack alarm and carrying it in your hand when walking at night, in case you need it quickly.
- Avoid confrontation – it's better and safer to walk away if you are being provoked or hassled.
- Be aware of others around you at cash point machines and try not to use cash machines at night or in poorly lit areas. If you must use one, go with a friend and leave as soon as you have your money.
- Always memorise your PIN (personal identification number) to access your money from a cash machine. Never write down your PIN or give it to anyone else.
- Have your keys ready well before you reach the door of your car or house.
- Carry your bag close to you with the clasp facing inwards or strap it over your shoulder. If someone grabs your bag, let it go. Your safety is more important.
- If you live in halls of residence, make sure no strangers follow you when you walk through the main entrance. This is important for your safety as well as those living there too.





## Using public transport

Public transport in the UK is reliable, relatively inexpensive and convenient to use.

Here are some tips on using it safely:

- If travelling by bus, try not to wait at bus stops alone. When you are on the bus, sit downstairs if you are on a double-decker, where the driver and other passengers can see you. Arrange for others to meet you at the bus stop if you are returning late and have a long way to walk home.
- If you can, take a taxi rather than walk the streets with a road map and your luggage.
- If you travel by train or the Underground (the 'Tube'), try not to sit in an empty carriage. Try to sit near groups of people in a well-lit area.
- When you are on the train, store your luggage as close to your seat as possible or where you can easily see it. If you use a luggage rack, check your belongings regularly, especially when a train stops at a station.
- If you are travelling a long way by train, make sure someone knows which train you are travelling on and when you are due to arrive.
- Check the time of the last train, bus, tube or tram home to avoid being stranded at night. Think about texting a message about your travel arrangements to a friend.
- Always have cash on you and a back-up plan if you are separated from the people you are travelling with.
- If you are lost or in need of assistance when travelling by train, find a member of staff or telephone the British Transport Police on freephone 0800 40 50 40.
- Do not open the doors until your transport home has completely stopped.
- Try to avoid walking alone after getting off a train, bus, tube or tram. If you can, walk close to a group of people or arrange for someone to meet you.
- Never walk across or touch railway lines – it is very dangerous and you could be badly injured or even killed.
- To remain safe and alert, don't listen to iPods or have long conversations on mobile phones while you are walking.

## Using taxis

There will probably be times when you need to take a taxi during your stay in the UK – for instance, when you first arrive here or after a night out. If you don't feel safe walking home, use a taxi.

However, you do need to be aware of some basic safety guidelines about using them. Here are some helpful tips:

- If you need to use a taxi, ask your educational institution to recommend a taxi company and keep the telephone number handy – never use an unlicensed company.
- Check the back of the taxi to ensure there is an official licence plate displayed before you get in. If you are still not sure, ask to see the driver's identification.
- Be aware that some 'minicabs' that stop in the street may be cheaper, but are not licensed and are therefore not as safe as taxis or minicabs that you arrange by telephone. You must pre-book private hire taxis otherwise you are not insured to be in the vehicle.
- If the taxi does not have a meter, agree the fare with the driver before you get into the taxi in order to avoid misunderstandings when you get to your destination.
- Sit in the back of a taxi and directly behind the driver, whenever possible.
- It is quite acceptable to chat with the driver, but do not give away any personal information.
- Have your cash ready and leave the cab before you pay the driver. Some educational institutions have agreements with taxi firms, so if you don't have any cash, you can give your student card details to the driver and pay later. Ask your students' union for details.
- If you want, you can ask your taxi driver to wait until you have entered your house safely, before he or she drives away.





## Driving in the UK

As an international student, you must make sure you fulfil the legal requirements and be aware of the correct procedures before you drive in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

You must have a valid licence that allows you to drive in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales). There are different arrangements in Northern Ireland.

If you wish to drive you must find out if you can use your existing licence, which will depend on where your licence was issued. Information can be found at [www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/DriverLicensing/DrivingInGbOnAForeignLicence/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/DriverLicensing/DrivingInGbOnAForeignLicence/index.htm)

For international students from outside the EEA: during the first year of your stay in the UK you can drive with a valid driving licence from your own country or an International Driving Permit, but after one year you must take out a provisional UK licence and put 'L' plates on your car. You must then arrange to sit a full UK driving test. Until you pass your test, a person who holds a full UK driving licence must sit at your side whenever you are driving and you cannot drive on a motorway.



The car must also be covered by insurance, registered and taxed and if it over three years old, it must have an MOT Certificate. GB licences are issued by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). If you have a driving licence that was issued in your home country, you must find out if you can use it to drive in Great Britain and how long it is valid for. A guidance note – *Driving in England, Scotland and Wales: a guide for international students* – can be found at [www.ukcisa.org.uk/student/info\\_sheets/driving.php](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/student/info_sheets/driving.php)

*The Highway Code* is a government publication that provides a summary of UK traffic law and has pictures of all the road signs in use in the UK (many of which are also used throughout the European Union). You can buy this at most good bookshops or read it online at [www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/highwaycode/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/highwaycode/index.htm)

While driving in the UK there are legal requirements that you must adhere to:

- If you are caught driving without insurance, road tax, or a valid licence you will face prosecution and be fined.
- You must drive on the left hand side of the road and overtake on the right.
- If you are riding a motorbike or 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 under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- You must observe all speed limits (30 miles per hour is usually the maximum speed limit in built up areas).
- If you are caught speeding by a police officer or speed camera you will be fined and have points put on your licence.
- You will be barred from driving if you accumulate 12 points.
- You must observe the minimum age limits; the minimum age for driving a car or riding a motorcycle is 17 years of age.
- It is illegal to use a hand-held mobile phone or send or read text messages while driving.
- Remember, pedestrians have the right of way when on pedestrian crossings.
- More detailed information on these requirements can be found in *The Highway Code*.



Here are a few more tips to help you drive safely in the UK:

- If you are going on a long journey, plan your route using main roads, and telephone ahead to let someone know roughly when to expect you.
- Before you set off, check your tyres and fuel and oil levels. Tyre weld/automatic latex puncture aerosol is useful in case of a flat tyre in a remote area, as it will mend a punctured tyre for long enough for you to reach a garage.
- Always keep a blanket, warm clothes, a pair of boots, a good torch in the car and check the batteries regularly.
- Handbags or briefcases are safer if placed on the floor or behind seats rather than on the passenger seat.
- Don't leave valuables on open display in the car – if you have to leave them in the car, lock them in the boot or trunk so they are out of sight. Try to park your vehicle away from secluded areas and part in a well-lit place if possible. Lock your car while parked in a petrol station.
- If you are travelling in a car alone, lock all the doors and keep the windows closed while you are driving.
- Make sure you are a member of a breakdown organisation. All breakdown organisations give priority to lone females.

## Cycling in the UK

The following advice is intended to help international students with the transition between cycling in your home country and the UK.

Once you have purchased a bicycle, find out if there are any local cycle shops where they will service your bike and show you how to give it regular safety checks.

N.B. It is vital that you purchase a cycle helmet. Use lights if possible at all times and wear fluorescent and reflective jackets.

In many cities there will be cycle lanes so ask your institution if they provide cycle maps. Some cycle lanes can be shared with buses or pedestrians and these need to be used with extra care. Buses have limited visibility so cyclists should stay behind a bus and in full view of the mirrors, where the bus driver can see you clearly. Manoeuvres around a bus make a cyclist very vulnerable as a bus driver can only see behind by using mirrors.

All traffic signs and traffic lights should be obeyed and are available to view at [www.direct.gov.uk/highwaycode](http://www.direct.gov.uk/highwaycode)

Complicated junctions need great experience and confidence in cycling. Practical training or cycling with an experienced friend will help this confidence during the transition period. Alternatively, it may be advisable to consider using Google Maps to find an alternative route or use a local map in conjunction with a cycle map to plan a safer route. This is a useful activity for new students to help you find your way around your new locality.





## Laws in the UK

The laws in the UK may be different from those in your home country. This especially applies to the use of tobacco, alcohol and self-defence sprays.

- You must not carry illegal drugs or substances with you of any kind (unless prescribed by a doctor), or use or supply any illegal drugs, including cannabis, ecstasy, LSD or amphetamines.
- It is illegal to carry any sort of weapon including knives, self-defence CS gas sprays, guns or stun guns.
- You must be 18 and over to buy tobacco.
- It is an illegal offence for anyone under the age of 18 to purchase alcohol or to have alcohol purchased for them.
- Never buy property that you think might be stolen, no matter how tempting a bargain it might seem.

You can find an essential guide to the law in the UK at [www.direct.gov.uk/en/CrimeJusticeAndTheLaw/Thejudicialsystem/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/CrimeJusticeAndTheLaw/Thejudicialsystem/index.htm)

## Powers of arrest

The police help to protect people in the community but are also there to ensure laws are followed. Police officers in the UK have the power to arrest people who are suspected of having committed an offence. Arrests can also be made if you fail to pay a fine, appear in court when asked to do so, or if you refuse to give your name and address to a police officer when asked.

Where offences are considered minor, you will be issued with a summons to appear in a Magistrate's Court initially. If you do not respond to this a police officer may arrest you.

If you are stopped in the street by a police officer, you have the right to ask why you have been stopped. However, remember that the police may search you if they believe you are in possession of a controlled drug, offensive or sharp object, or carrying stolen goods.

If you are arrested you will be officially cautioned. You do not have to say anything to the police. But if you are later charged with a crime and you have not mentioned, when questioned, something that you later rely on in court, then this may be taken into account when deciding if you are guilty or not. Anything you do say can later be used against you.

If you are arrested and taken to a police station, you are under no obligation to say anything until you have spoken to a solicitor. It is your right to see a solicitor when you ask and this service is free of charge. However, if you have been arrested following any drink offence and the police wish to breathalyse you, this can be done before you speak to a solicitor. Your solicitor may be present when you are questioned.

The police can only keep you at a police station for a certain amount of time, normally 24 hours, unless, depending on the offence, they ask magistrates for an extension.

If you are arrested, contact your institution and or your sponsor.

If you need legal assistance, there are a number of organisations that can help you:

- Community Legal Service Direct offers access to free legal information and advice. Find out more at [www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/GettingLegalAdvice/Gettinglegaladviceandlegalaid/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/GettingLegalAdvice/Gettinglegaladviceandlegalaid/index.htm) or telephone 0845 345 4345.
- You can also contact the Citizens Advice Bureaux at [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) – they provide free, confidential and independent advice in their offices, colleges and other institutions across the UK. Advice is available face to face and by telephone on issues such as debt problems, legal difficulties, discrimination and housing.



## Racial discrimination and harassment

The population of the UK is increasingly diverse and a great many religions and ethnic groups are represented here. Britain is a tolerant society that believes in respecting the rights of minority groups. This belief is supported by law: the Race Relations Act is one of the most comprehensive laws against racial discrimination in the world and works towards the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunity between people of different racial groups.

If you are subjected to any form of racial discrimination or harassment, report it to your institution. They will have a formal procedure to assist individuals who feel they have been discriminated against. You can also report it to the local branch of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The Commission will provide information and advice to anyone who thinks he or she has suffered racial discrimination or harassment.

You can contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission on their helplines:

England 0845 604 6610  
Wales 0845 604 8810  
Scotland 0845 604 5510

or find out more from their website at  
[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)



# Hate crime

A hate crime is defined as any incident, which constitutes a criminal offence, which is perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice or hate.

Hatred is a strong term that goes beyond simply causing offence or hostility. A hate crime is any criminal offence committed against a person or property that is motivated by an offender's hatred of someone because of their:

- race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality or national origins
- religion
- gender or gender identity
- sexual orientation
- disability.

A hate crime can take many forms including:

- Physical attacks – such as physical assault, damage to property, offensive graffiti, neighbour disputes and arson.
- Threat of attack – including offensive letters, abusive or obscene telephone calls, groups hanging around to intimidate you and your family and unfounded, malicious complaints.
- Verbal abuse or insults – offensive leaflets and posters, abusive gestures, dumping of rubbish outside homes or through letterboxes, bullying at school or in the workplace.
- Hate crime can occur at home or close to home. It can take place in a public place, like on the street, in public facilities or can be on a bus or in the library; it can even occur while at school, college, university or in the workplace.

By reporting any crime the incident can be investigated fully and you can get the service you deserve and the support you need. The police will deal with incidents and complaints promptly and sensitively, respect your views and treat them professionally, inform and work with the Community and Diversity Officer during the investigation and keep you informed of any progress and outcome of a complaint.



## Useful helplines and websites

The following helplines and websites offer impartial information and support by telephone and on the internet. Information and advice in most cases is free and confidential. Remember, these organisations are there to help you, so do not hesitate to contact them if you need assistance.

### **Association of British Insurers**

[www.abi.org.uk](http://www.abi.org.uk)

### **British Insurance Brokers' Association**

Information about insurance and insurance providers in the UK.

[www.biba.org.uk](http://www.biba.org.uk)

### **British Transport Police**

Provides a policing service on the railways throughout Great Britain, the London Underground, the Docklands Light Railway, the Midland Metro tram system and the Croydon Tramlink.

[www.btp.police.uk](http://www.btp.police.uk)

### **Childalert.co.uk**

Comprehensive advice and personal safety guidance for children.

[www.childalert.co.uk](http://www.childalert.co.uk)

### **Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB)**

The CAB service helps people resolve their money, legal and other problems by providing information and advice.

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

### **Advice guide (CAB)**

[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

### **Community Legal Service Direct**

Access to free legal information and advice.

[www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/GettingLegalAdvice/Gettinglegaladviceandlegalaid/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/GettingLegalAdvice/Gettinglegaladviceandlegalaid/index.htm)

T 0845 345 4345

### **Crimestoppers**

The charity Crimestoppers runs the 0800 555 111 number, which allows people to telephone anonymously with information about criminals or crimes. The information is then passed on to the police. Just tell them what you know, not who you are.

[www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)

### **Directgov**

Lots of useful safety advice and tips regarding crime prevention and self-defence.

[www.direct.gov.uk/en/CrimeJusticeAndTheLaw/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/CrimeJusticeAndTheLaw/index.htm)

### **Drinkline**

Advice on sensible drinking and alcohol misuse.

[www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/26738981](http://www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/26738981)

T 0800 917 8282

### **Equality and Human Rights Commission**

Offers support and advice in cases of racial discrimination or harassment.

[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

T 020 7939 0000

### **Get Safe Online**

Advice on how to keep yourself safe online.

[www.getsafeonline.org](http://www.getsafeonline.org)

### **Highway Code**

Advice on traffic law in the UK.

[www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/highwaycode/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/highwaycode/index.htm)





### **Home Office**

The Home Office has a website giving practical advice on protecting yourself against identity theft.

[www.identitytheft.org.uk](http://www.identitytheft.org.uk)

### **Home Office Crime Reduction**

Useful information and resources about crime prevention.

[www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk)

### **Immobilise Crime**

To register your mobile phone, bicycle or laptop, and for advice on what to do if they are stolen. Immobilise also sell property marking kits, electronic tags for bikes, luggage tags and tracker key tags and recovery services, security tags and stickers, window stickers, hologram security stickers and laptop insurance.

[www.immobilise.com](http://www.immobilise.com)

T 08701 123 123

### **National Domestic Violence Helpline**

Free 24-Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline

T 0808 2000 247

Free telephone support for women experiencing domestic violence.

T 0908 2000 247

For men experiencing domestic violence

[www.mensadvice.org.uk/mens\\_advice.php](http://www.mensadvice.org.uk/mens_advice.php)

### **National Drugs Helpline**

A 24-hour, seven days a week, free, confidential service offering advice and information to individuals concerned about drugs.

[www.urban75.com/Drugs/helpline.html](http://www.urban75.com/Drugs/helpline.html)

T 0800 77 66 00

### **National Lesbian and Gay Switchboard**

Information, support and referral service for homosexual men and women.

T 020 7837 7324

### **National Union of Students**

The website for the National Union of Students (NUS).

[www.nus.org.uk](http://www.nus.org.uk)

### **NHS Direct**

NHS Direct offers confidential health advice and information, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

T 0845 4647

### **Rape Crisis Federation for Wales and England**

Help for women who have suffered rape, sexual abuse, attack or harassment.

[www.rapecrisis.co.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.co.uk)

**Refuge**

For women and children facing domestic abuse

[www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)

Free 24-Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline

T 0808 2000 247

**Samaritans (24 hours)**

The Samaritans provide confidential support to individuals in emotional distress.

[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

T 0845 790 9090

**Stonewall**

A political lobbying group working for the civil, political, economic social and cultural rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

[www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)

T 020 7881 9440

**Student Accommodation**

A directory of student accommodation and associated links.

[www.studentaccommodation.org](http://www.studentaccommodation.org)

**Suzy Lamplugh Trust**

A national charity offering advice on how to stay safe.

[www.suzylamplugh.org](http://www.suzylamplugh.org)

T 020 8876 0305

**Terrence Higgins Trust**

The Terrence Higgins Trust delivers health promotion campaigns, national and local services to people with or affected by AIDS.

[www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)

T 0845 1221 200

**Text You Home**

Text service that transforms your mobile phone into a personal safety alarm.

[www.textyouhome.com](http://www.textyouhome.com)

**UKCISA – The UK Council for International Student Affairs**

Offers advice and comprehensive guidance notes on aspects of studying in the UK for international students.

[www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk)

**ukstudentlife.com**

Information about keeping yourself and your belongings safe.

[www.ukstudentlife.com/Personal/Safety.htm](http://www.ukstudentlife.com/Personal/Safety.htm)



### **Victim Support**

An independent charity that helps people cope with the effects of crime. They provide free and confidential support and information to help individuals deal with their experiences.

[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

**Supportline** 0845 30 30 900

### **Women's Aid**

Offers support and a place of safety to abused women and children.

[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

**T** 0808 2000 247

