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How to **STUDY ABROAD** in the

United Kingdom



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Consistently one of the world's top destinations for international students, the UK offers a chance to be part of a historic, dynamic and varied student population.

Modern British culture is an eclectic mix of international influences – a result of the country's long-standing role on the world stage – and a wealth of diverse regional customs and cultures which are strongly celebrated and constantly re-invented.

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England has by far the biggest population among the four constituent members of the UK, and also attracts the largest numbers of international students. But each of the other home nations – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – offers an equally enticing offering, with truly unique cultural and natural settings to explore, as well as many excellent universities.

It is said that in the UK, the locals have a different accent every 30 miles that you travel. This is an apt reflection of the diversity of the country and its people, and is complemented by an equally diverse selection of universities and study locations. Whatever type of university and environment you're seeking, read on for our complete guide to studying abroad in the UK...



Higher education in the UK

The UK's well-established reputation for world-class education is reflected in its strong presence in the global rankings. The **QS World University Rankings® 2016-2017** features no less than 71 UK universities, with the country claiming four of the world's top 10 universities.

Some of the UK's top universities are legendary, and have inspired countless works of film and literature. In particular, many people around the world are familiar with the iconic image of the 'dreaming spires' of the **University of Oxford** (the oldest university in the English-speaking world) and the (only very slightly younger) **University of Cambridge**.

The UK's other two entries in the global top 10 can both be found in the UK capital. **University College London (UCL)** ranks 7th in the world, and **Imperial College London** 9th. In total, London is home to 47 universities, a significant portion of the country's total of 109. This high density of universities, combined with the city's historic and current role as a global center for finance, business and culture, makes it a highly popular place to study.

Beyond London, the UK is home to many other world-leading institutions and attractive locations. In the post-industrial Midlands and Northern England you'll find many of the country's slightly younger, so-called "redbrick" universities. Many of these are now among the country's most illustrious, including the **University of Manchester**, **University of Birmingham**, **University of Sheffield**, and **University of Liverpool**.

Further north still, Scotland has its "ancient four" – the Universities of **Edinburgh**, **Glasgow**, **St Andrews** and **Aberdeen**. All founded before the year 1600, they all feature high-up in the QS World University Rankings. Scotland is also home to many younger universities, such as the Universities of **Stirling** and **Strathclyde** and **Heriot-Watt University**, as well as specialist schools such as the Glasgow School of Art, resulting in a varied academic offering to rival that of its southern neighbor.

Past England's western border, Wales is known for its rugged landscapes, friendly people, and a group of celebrated universities that includes **Cardiff University** and **Swansea University**. Several Welsh universities offer bilingual programs, taught in both Welsh and English, in recognition of demand for the native language to be cherished and preserved.

Finally, the UK's fourth constituent nation, Northern Ireland, continues to tempt international students across the Irish Sea with its idyllic drumlins (rolling green hills shaped during the last ice age), vibrant folk culture and a good selection of universities, including **Ulster University** and **Queen's University Belfast**.



Admission requirements & applications

At undergraduate level, all applications – for both domestic and international students – are made via the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS). Students are required to register on the UCAS website, which then guides applicants through all stages of the process. This includes information on how to plan and execute your application, what details and documents to include, how to track the progress of your application, and how to contact universities that offer you a place.

For postgraduate applications, you can now use UKPASS, run by UCAS, to apply for some (but not all) postgraduate courses. Alternatively, you can apply for courses directly through the university, with each application process differing slightly.

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As an international student, you may also need to provide proof of your English language proficiency (i.e. TOEFL/IELTS scores) and a copy of your passport. PhD students will typically be asked to present a research proposal. Some universities may ask applicants to attend an interview, either in person or via phone/internet.

Student visas

Whether or not you need a student visa to study in the UK depends on your country of origin. If you are living outside the UK and are not a national of a country within the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, you will need to apply for a Tier 4 (general) student visa.

You should apply for your visa at least three months before you're due to travel, and will need to have received an unconditional offer of a place to study at a UK university on your chosen course.

You should apply for your visa at least three months before you're due to travel, and will need to have received an unconditional offer of a place to study at a UK university on your chosen course. Other requirements for a student visa include:

- Passport details
- A recent photograph
- Proof of adequate English language skills, demonstrated by passing one of the secure English language tests (SELT). You will not need to provide this if you're from an English-speaking country such as the US, or have completed a qualification equivalent to a UK degree in an English-speaking country.

Depending on your country of origin, you may also be required to have certain medical vaccinations or undertake a tuberculosis test.



The UK Border Agency (UKBA) also requires international students to prove they have secured the necessary funds to live and study in the country. When applying for a visa, students planning to study in London must demonstrate that they will have access to UK£1,265 (~US\$1,560) for each month of stay in the UK. For the rest of the UK, this figure is slightly lower, at UK£1,015 (~US\$1,250).

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The cost of applying for the visa is £328 (approx. US\$400). The Short Term Study Visa costs £89 (~US\$110) for the six-month option and £170 (~US\$210) for the 11-month visa. You'll also need to pay a healthcare surcharge of £150 per year (~US\$180) in order to access the National Health Service (NHS) during your stay. For more information, visit the government site www.gov.uk.



What does Brexit mean for visas?

The UK's decision to exit the European Union – known as “Brexit” – has led to some uncertainty as to whether EU students will need a visa to study in the UK. While there will be no immediate changes to visa policies, it is likely that there will be some changes once the exit process is completed.

There are currently plans to commence the process of leaving the EU by the end of March 2017. This will open a two-year negotiation window, and it is unlikely that new regulations will come into effect until this is closed. If the UK withdraws from existing agreements concerning freedom of movement, future EU students may need to apply for a student visa to study in the UK. If you're concerned about how Brexit might affect you, check the latest news updates online and/or contact the UK university you plan to study at.

Tuition fees, living costs & funding

The cost of studying in the UK, at either undergraduate or postgraduate level, will be affected by your country of origin, and also by which part of the UK you want to study in. For international students from outside of the EU, fees are typically higher than for UK and EU students.

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Fees for UK and EU students

At undergraduate level, universities in England can charge up to £9,250 (~US\$ 11,370) per year for UK and EU students. The maximum amount in Wales is £9,000 (~US\$11,070). For Northern Ireland the limit is £3,925 (~US\$4,830) for EU and Northern Irish students, and up to £9,250 for students from the rest of the UK. In Scotland there are no tuition fees at undergraduate level for domestic or EU students (except those from the other three parts of the UK, who will pay up to £9,250 a year). For postgraduate qualifications, most courses cost between £4,900 a year to £30,000 (~US\$6,030-36,900), with some specialized courses costing more.





Fees for international students

For international students, undergraduate tuition fees vary, starting at around £10,000 (~US\$12,300) and rising to £35,000 (~\$43,100) or more for an undergraduate medical degree at the top of the price range.

At postgraduate level, international fees for classroom-based programs start at £9,700 (~US\$11,930) and go up to £32,000 (~US\$39,360) depending on your course. For laboratory-based programs, average annual fees vary from £9,900 (~US\$12,180) up to £25,000 (~US\$30,800), while for clinical degree programs the annual fees start at around £11,250 (~US\$13,900) and are as high as £42,000 (~US\$51,700) for programs such as medicine.

Living costs

As in most countries, the cost of living in the UK varies by region, with city life often proving more expensive. According to figures from the UK's National Union of Students (NUS), the average annual cost of living in England (outside of London) for students is £12,056 (~US\$14,850). For those studying in London, the estimate is £15,180 (~US\$18,700) per year.

If you're applying for a student visa, you'll need to prove you have enough money to cover living costs for each month of your course, up to a maximum of nine months. This is currently deemed to be £9,135 (~US\$11,250) for a nine-month period outside of London, and £11,385 (~US\$14,000) within London.

The biggest difference in the cost of living in London compared to the rest of England is in rent, with University College London (UCL) estimating accommodation expenses of £8,034 (~US\$9,900) per academic year (nine months). University-owned student halls are likely to provide the most cost-effective option.



Will Brexit mean higher fees?

The UK's decision to exit the European Union means many EU students are concerned about their tuition fees increasing. Many UK universities have pledged to keep tuition fees at the same rate for current students for the duration of their course. The UK government has also announced that EU students commencing studies at English universities in autumn 2017 will continue to be charged the same fees as domestic students throughout their course, and remain eligible for the same loans and grants – even if the UK leaves the EU during this time. Similarly, EU students enrolling in an undergraduate program in Scotland in the 2017/18 academic year will continue to be charged no tuition fees for all four years of their course.

Funding opportunities

Home students (UK citizens) are eligible for loans, grants and other forms of funding to cover their tuition fees, with differing amounts of funding depending on location. While student loans for home students tend to cover full tuition fees at undergraduate level, the additional loan to cover the cost of living in the UK often falls short of the needed amount. The maximum living costs loan in the 2017-2018 academic year is set at UK£8,430 (~\$10,400) for students outside of London and up to £11,002 (~US\$13,560) for those who study in London.

Undergraduate home students at private UK universities (there are only three) can apply for tuition fee loans for most courses, as well as maintenance loans and maintenance grants. However, the tuition fee loan might not cover the full amount.

A large range of scholarships to study in the UK are offered by the government, individual universities, independent organizations and various charities.

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Prominent scholarships for international students include:

- **Chevening Scholarships** – Government-funded scholarships open to outstanding students with leadership potential from around the world, to study at postgraduate level at accredited UK universities.
- **Marshall Scholarships** – Scholarships for high-achieving US students to study in the UK.
- **Commonwealth Scholarships and fellowships** – Scholarships offered by member governments to citizens of other Commonwealth countries.

Scholarships are more widely available at postgraduate level, with relatively few offered for undergraduate students. However, always check with your chosen university, as support is often available for exceptional undergraduate students.





LONDON

Home to nine million people, this vast metropolis is the financial, cultural and political center of the country. London life is busy and fast-paced, so if you don't like crowds or noise, it might not be the place for you! It has a (deserved) reputation for being expensive, so may also not be the best choice for those on a tight budget – but most of those who choose to study in London will agree that the city is worth every penny in the opportunities for culture, fun and networking on offer.

Home to many of the best libraries, museums, art galleries, nightclubs and theaters in the UK, and the hub of many of its most competitive professional sectors, London has more to see and do than you'll have time to get to the end of – even if you stay long enough to complete a PhD. Indeed, there are few places in the world which can guarantee as exciting and diverse an experience, both academically and otherwise.

Universities in London include some of the world's best; the city has no less than 18 universities featured in the QS World University Rankings®. These include two universities in the global top 10 – **UCL (University College London)** and **Imperial College London**. Other top London universities include **King's College London** (21st) and the social sciences specialist **London School of Economics and Political Science** (LSE; joint 37th).

MANCHESTER

Manchester is famed for its music scene – few cities have produced as many prominent bands and acts (such as the Sex Pistols and Oasis) in the past 30 years. The city is home to an eclectic range of music venues, large and small, and the city's music scene is as vibrant and fast-moving as ever. The Northern Quarter is popularly considered the cultural and musical heart of the city, while the Canal Street area – the center of the city's gay community – is among its liveliest nightspots.

While Manchester is undoubtedly something of a party town, it's also big on sports – especially football (soccer). The global fame of Manchester

United is difficult to beat, while local rival Manchester City is one of the wealthiest clubs in the world. Manchester should also be on your shortlist if you're a fan of architecture – you'll find an interesting variety of styles, from Victorian and Gothic to contemporary skyscrapers. Meanwhile Chinese students may be interested to know Manchester has the third largest Chinese population in Europe, along with a thriving Chinatown area.

Among universities in Manchester, the top ranking institution is the **University of Manchester** (home to Manchester Business School), placed 29th in the QS World University Rankings 2016-2017. If you want to get more of a feel for the university, you could tune in to its student radio station, Fuse FM, or perhaps listen to MMU Radio, run by students from the nearby **Manchester Metropolitan University**. Also just outside the city center is the **University of Salford**, not far from the BBC's new MediaCity complex, and a cluster of cultural venues including the Lowry Center and the Museum of Science and Industry.

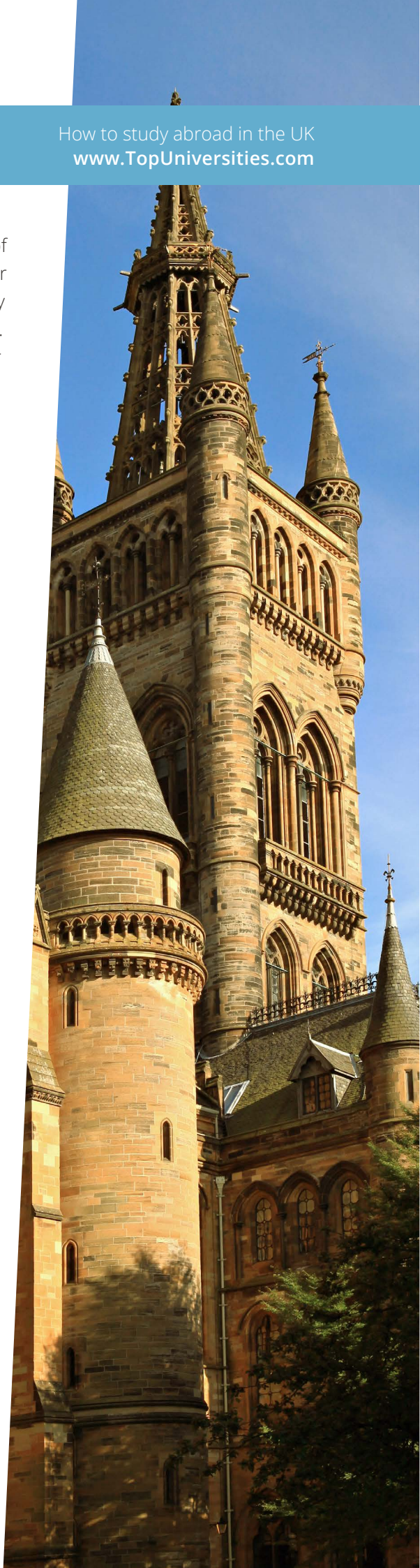
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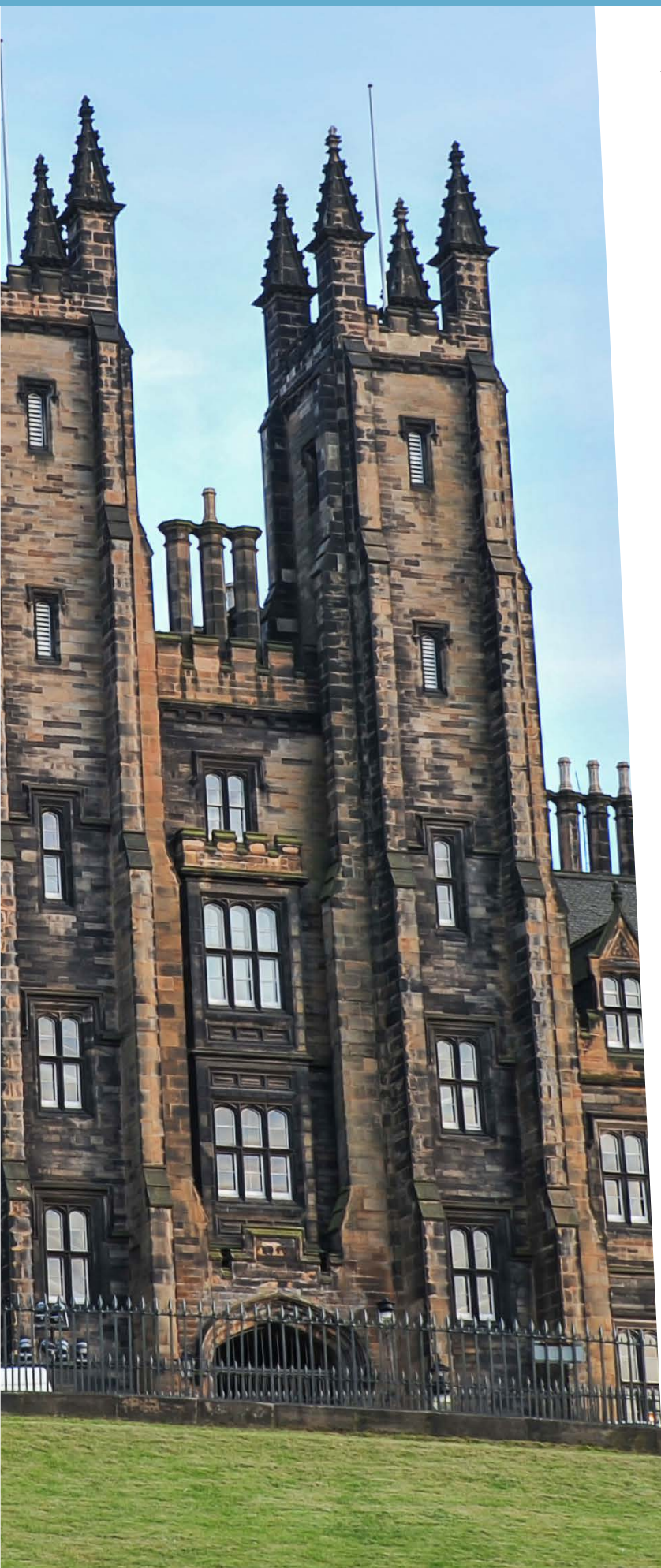
The UK's second-largest city, Birmingham rose to prominence during the industrial revolution. Today Birmingham (or Brum, as it is known affectionately to locals) is a thriving commercial hub, home to the UK's largest shopping area outside of London, and one of the most multicultural places in the UK. It offers thriving art, music and literary scenes, including the prestigious City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and a range of other cultural institutions.

Birmingham's six universities make the city the UK's largest center of higher education and academic research outside of the capital, while the ongoing 'Big City Plan' aims to make Birmingham one of the top 20 most liveable cities in the world within 20 years. The highest-ranked university in Birmingham is the **University of Birmingham**, at 82nd in the QS World University Rankings, followed by **Aston University** (within the global top 400) and four other universities, including the **Open University's** West Midlands regional center.

EDINBURGH

Home to the UK's fifth highest-ranking university, the **University of Edinburgh**, the Scottish capital is famous for its range of historical and cultural attractions, such as Edinburgh Castle (Scotland's most-visited site), Holyrood Palace, the medieval Old Town and 18th century Georgian New Town. It's also the setting





for popular events such as the annual Edinburgh International Festival and the Fringe – the largest arts festival in the world. These all help to make the city the UK's second most-visited after London, welcoming over 1.5 million tourists in 2015.

Edinburgh has also long been a center of education, particularly in the fields of medicine, Scots law, literature, the sciences and engineering, earning it the nickname “the Athens of the North”. Students make up around a fifth of the population, including a high number of international students, with the University of Edinburgh joined by institutions including **Heriot-Watt University** (ranked joint 327th in the world) and **Edinburgh Napier University**.

GLASGOW

It may have lived for many years in the genteel shadow of Edinburgh, but Scotland's largest city has in recent years shaken off its former gritty reputation to emerge as one of the UK's most dynamic up-and-coming cities.

With historic architecture, distinctive local traditions and museums to rival any city in the UK, Glasgow now also has enough trendy bars, restaurants and gig venues to keep even the most hardened hipster entertained (plus the world's tallest cinema). PETA has declared the city to be the most vegan-friendly in the UK. And, while Glasgow is the largest city in Scotland, it is not as overrun by tourists as Edinburgh and has a significantly lower cost of living. It also has the largest student population in Scotland (and the second largest in the UK, after London).

In keeping with the city's general upwards trajectory, universities in Glasgow have been climbing the rankings in recent years. The **University of Glasgow** now stands at joint 63rd in the QS World University Rankings, while the **University of Strathclyde** is ranked joint 272nd.

COVENTRY

Coventry made its debut in the 2015 edition of the **QS Best Student Cities** index, claiming a place among the world's top 50 cities for students thanks to its large student community and strong reputation among graduate employers. Located in the West Midlands area of England, the city is home to **Coventry University** (ranked among the world's top 700), and the **University of Warwick** (ranked joint 51st in the world), which is just to the south of the city center on a 700-acre campus. Their combined student population is around 13% of the city total, with international students making up around 36% of enrolments. St. Michael's Cathedral is Coventry's best-known landmark and visitor attraction, built after the previous cathedral was largely destroyed during World War II.

OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE

Yes, Oxford and Cambridge are two separate cities, each with a distinct history and character. But the two halves of 'Oxbridge' are also bound together in the collective imagination as semi-mythical academic enclaves with a profound historic affinity, as well as a somewhat tongue-in-cheek rivalry. Both are old medieval towns, built on rivers and situated towards the south of England not far from London, both are relatively quiet and peaceful, and both are completely dominated by their universities – the two oldest in the Anglophone world.

Oxford and Cambridge are both collegiate universities, and their constituent colleges loom large over the city centers, which you'll also notice are teeming with the bright young attendees, many of them on bicycles. While Cambridge is home to a large cluster of high-technology industries such as software and bioscience, earning it the name 'Silicon Fen' (a play on Silicon Valley), Oxford has a long history of brewing and has been an important center of motor-manufacturing for years, with the main production site for Mini cars, now owned by BMW, based there.



Accommodation and healthcare

Student accommodation

Most international students in the UK live in accommodation provided by the university, with main accommodation types including halls of residence, student houses and student flats. These can be catered or self-catered, with home stays (staying with a UK family) being fairly uncommon amongst university students. You can also choose from a range of private accommodation, either living by yourself or sharing with a group of friends. International students are usually given preference for places in student halls, while there are plenty of websites to help with house-hunting. The Student Union and the Student Housing Office at your university should also be great sources of information on how to find accommodation.

Healthcare

While private healthcare in the UK can be expensive, all international students on full-time courses lasting at least six months are entitled to use the National Health Service (NHS). Those applying for a student visa of six months or more will need to pay the immigration health surcharge of £150 (~US\$190) per person per year.

The NHS provides free registration and consultation with an NHS doctor (GP) or nurse, free hospital treatment when referred by a GP, and a standard charge for each item of prescribed medicine (except in Wales and Scotland, where prescriptions are free). You may be able to register with the NHS at your university health center. Otherwise, you should register at a GP center close to your accommodation. The UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) is also a good resource for details about healthcare, student support, and working during or after your studies.



Freshers' Week

You'll probably find that your UK university will hold a series of welcome events for international students, including social activities, workshops and 'orientation sessions', with a chance to explore the campus and local area. You can also join in with 'Freshers' Week', a week-long (or sometimes fortnight-long) calendar of events designed to welcome all new students. There will also be a Freshers' Fair, which is a chance to join student clubs and societies that interest you.

Working in the UK after graduation

There are several visa schemes which allow international students to remain and work in the UK after the completion of their studies. The Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa scheme accepts 2,000 graduates a year, and is designed for entrepreneurial graduates who wish to remain in the UK and begin their own businesses. This requires the graduate to be endorsed by a UK institution, but not necessarily the college or university where they studied.

A Tier 2 (General) visa is the most popular route for graduates looking to take up employment, and is designed for skilled workers from outside the EEA and Switzerland, who have been offered a job in the UK. To be eligible for this visa, you'll need:

- A job with a salary of at least £25,000 (~US\$30,800) per year;
- At least £945 (~US\$1,200) in your bank account for 90 days before you apply, or a certificate of financial sponsorship.
- A certificate from a licensed working visa sponsor.

Other documents needed include your passport, proof that you have the required level of English, and (for residents of some countries) tuberculosis test results.

More information about this and the other visas can be found on the websites of the UK Government and the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA).

Like many European countries, the UK saw a squeeze in the employment market following the financial crisis of 2008. However, recent figures suggest unemployment levels are falling, and the diversity of careers in the UK's dynamic tertiary sector means there's plenty of scope for talented graduates, particularly those who've acquired both academic specialization and professional experience.



More questions?

Want to get advice from other international students in the UK?
Ask a question in our [international student forums](#).

