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

2017–18
‘It’s important to integrate into the local community. I’ve made lots of friends locally and it’s helped me understand local behaviours.’

‘It is nice to know you are interested in our safety.’

‘101 is the police non-emergency number but in an emergency it’s still 999.’
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 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 are very important, not just when you first arrive but throughout your stay, so please refer back to the advice given here, even when you’re more familiar with life in the UK.

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 2016) 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.

In a British Council Student Insight Survey (2012), the UK was recognised as having a very multicultural society, with this factor being seen as contributing the most to the country’s overall safety. Following this was the awareness that, for most part, people in the UK do not carry guns and that the country has good medical care, closely following this were the low crime rate and shared language, and finally a high police presence.

Despite this, it is important to be aware of measures you can take to keep yourself safe. The suggestions in this guide can help you adopt sensible strategies intended to minimise the possibility of you becoming a victim. This booklet will help you to anticipate and recognise risks and to take action to remove or avoid them.

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 your belongings safe and secure.

Staff at your institution take their duty of care very seriously and 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.

International students have recently indicated how important their integration into the domestic student community is to enhance the overall perception of the UK. They say it has helped them to learn local behaviours and how to be more vigilant about their surroundings and ensured a real sense of self awareness.

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 and 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 travel, take a photocopy of all the pages of your passport (including the front and back covers) 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.
- Bring enough cash to cover your immediate needs (£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 and credit cards should be carried in a safe place, such as an inside pocket, a money belt or a zipped bag. If you lose your credit card, report the loss to the police and the issuing organisation immediately.
- https://www.gov.uk/contact-police
- 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 lose your passport or if it is stolen contact the police and apply to your Embassy immediately for a new passport and give them all your details. https://www.gov.uk/report-a-lost-or-stolen-passport
- In most cases you will need to apply for a replacement. The procedures vary depending whether you have an entry clearance sticker inside your passport or you have a biometric residence permit (BRP).
- https://www.gov.uk/biometric-residence-permits/replace and https://www.wise.uk.fco.gov.uk/home/welcome. You must also report loss or theft of your BRP by emailing BRPLost@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk
The police in the UK are friendly and helpful. They have a duty to protect everyone and can always be safely approached. A police officer from Greater Manchester Police Forces answers some questions in an interview available at this link https://tinytulip-britishcouncil.org/site/default/Interview-with_a_police_officer.pdf

The police are committed to promoting crime prevention and work in partnership with educational institutions, their student bodies, and 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 arrival in the UK. For further details regarding waiting times and what you need to take to your Overseas Visitors Records Office (OVRO), visit the Overseas Visitors Records Office (OVRO), 323 Borough High Street, London SE1 1JL. For further details regarding waiting times and what you need to take to your Overseas Visitors Records Office (OVRO), visit the Overseas Visitors Records Office (OVRO), 323 Borough High Street, London SE1 1JL.

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

Crimestoppers

The charity CrimeStoppers operates a service which allows people to anonymously pass on information about crimes or criminals. You can call them on +44 (0)800 555 111. Just tell them what you know, not who you are. You can report online via an anonymous form at https://crimestoppers-uk.org/reporting-center. Call +44 (0)300 123 2040 or use the online reporting tool www.actionfraud.police.uk/report_fraud

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.

Millions of us are now checking bank balances and transferring funds on smart phones and tablets every day. Some banking applications (apps) have no extra security for customers who make payments using their mobile – meaning a phone is a potential cash point for a clever thief. Check if your mobile banking provider asks for a pin number before you transfer money. If not, this may not be a safe way to check balances or transfer funds.

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. A police officer from Greater Manchester Police Forces answers some questions in an interview available at this link https://tinytulip-britishcouncil.org/site/default/Interview-with_a_police_officer.pdf

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How to report a crime

To report a non-emergency minor crime, just dial 101 or your local police station – you can find your number in the telephone directory, or as we mentioned where to register Register at the Overseas Visitors Records Office (OVRO); if you live in an area of London covered by the Metropolitan Police: Overseas Visitors Records Office (OVRO), 323 Borough High Street, London SE1 1JL; https://beta.met.police.uk/advice-and-information/registering-on-an-overseas-visitor-planning-your-visit-to-ovro/.

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 lose money or property you will be given a crime reference number, which you will need to make any insurance claim. 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, 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.

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.actionfraud.police.uk can help you to protect yourself against this happening. It advises you what to do if this does happen and suggests where to get further help.

Action Fraud is the UK’s national fraud and cyber crime reporting centre. Call +44 (0)300 123 2040 or use the online reporting tool www.actionfraud.police.uk/report_fraud

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TAKING OUT INSURANCE

We strongly advise you to insure your belongings when you arrive in case of theft or accidental damage. We also recommend that you take advantage of the insurance policies designed especially for international students which cover medical costs and your possessions. Before driving in the UK you must insure your car. Information relating to this can be found on most college and university campuses, or you can consult your students’ union or bank.

Be smart and insure your mobile phone. It is easy to lose a phone or break the screen when it’s dropped, so take time to find an insurance that will pay for loss, damage and if it’s stolen. Check how much you will have to pay in excess, if you have to pay off the remainder of any contract, if it’s stolen. Check how much you will have to pay in excess, if you have to pay off the remainder of any contract, if there is no no-claim period at the start of the policy, and whether the insurer pays for apps and accessories too.

Some criminals specifically target international students, telephoning them and pretending to be from a legitimate organisation (such as the UK Home Office, an education agent or even UKAS). They demand money (calling it a ‘fine’ for a non-existent immigration problem), and claim that if you do not pay them quickly, there will be damaging consequences (for example, deportation or cancelling your visa). For further information please see https://www.ukba.gov.uk/information/Advice/Studying/Living-in-the-UK/Frauds-and-scams or https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/frauds-tricks-and-scams

Frauds and Scams

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Money mules

The Financial Ombudsman Service has recently issued a warning that young people are particularly vulnerable to money mules. A money mule is generally someone who allows fraudsters to launder money through their bank account in return for a ‘fee’. Money mules can help criminals as ‘money mules’.

MONEY – GAMBLING

It was once the case that gambling only took place behind closed doors – you had to be brave enough to go into a bookmakers or a casino if you wanted to place a bet. Now, however, it is possible to gamble online from the comfort of your own home – you can even gamble using your mobile phone or tablet. As international students you are often responsible for large sums of money – money that is supposed to cover tuition fees and living expenses during your stay in the UK, and it is worth being aware of the dangers that gambling can pose. Some students have got carried away with the excitement and adrenaline rush of an early win, and have gone on to lose large sums – or even all their funds – gambling, either online or in casinos. This can lead to debts and other associated problems, including not being able to complete your course or stay in the UK. If you do decide to gamble, always remember to set a spending limit before you begin, and never gamble more money than you can afford to lose. If you think your gambling is out of control there are organisations which can help you at www.gamblersware.co.uk

Making use of inexpensive light timers will give the impression of occupancy. Consider making a list of your possessions (including model and serial numbers) for reference, and ideally, keep photographic records of your valuables.

Frauds and Scams

TAKING CARE OF YOUR BELONGINGS

When moving into new accommodation, don’t leave luggage or belongings outside or in the open boot/trunk of a car or taxi.

‘Money mule’ fraud is extremely serious and can carry prison sentences.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR MOBILE PHONE

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FINDING PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION

It’s important that you have safe and suitable accommodation while you are studying in the UK. Start making these 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. If you contact the student officer at your Embassy or High Commission before you leave for the UK they may be able to give you advice and information.

You can get information about accommodation 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 and safety talks offered at institutions.

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

◆◆ You can ask the accommodation office, the welfare office or the students’ union at your institution for help and advice. They may have lists of local accommodation to rent and might also have inspected it to check it is suitable. They may also be able to help if you have any problems.

◆◆ You should check whether the accommodation you are going to see is in a safe area before you go. Write to or email your local police and ask them if there have been any police visits, disturbances or anti-social behaviour orders instated in the area you are looking at. You can also ask if the property you are viewing has ever been burgled.

◆◆ Explore and compare crime and outcomes of crime in your neighbourhood. These 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 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 system.

◆◆ Be businesslike in your dealings with prospective landlords. You have different rights depending on what kind of tenancy agreement you have. It is worth asking the landlord about any disputes and what the neighbours are like. Check the tenancy agreement with staff at your institution before signing. The website 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 https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Studying--living-in-the-UK/Choosing-your-housing.

◆◆ If you have a bicycle, make sure you 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). Mark it with your postcode and house number, 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.

◆◆ Avoid displaying other expensive items, such as watches, jewellery or mobile phones in busy public places.

◆◆ It’s a good idea to register your most valued possessions, such as mobile phones, bicycles and laptops, free of charge, with Immobilise Phone Crime (www.immobilise. com). If you lose a mobile phone, call +44 (0)1703 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 dialing *#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.

◆◆ Report the loss online at https://www.reportmyloss.com/uk

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SAFETY AT HOME

Approximately 25 per cent of burglars don’t have to force entry. Most burglaries are committed during the day and access is usually gained through an open door or window. Burglary rates rise approximately 23 per cent during the summer months when homes are left empty during holidays and windows are left open and unlocked. Deterring would-be criminals is one of the most effective forms of crime prevention.

- You can speak to the crime prevention officer at your local police station. They will come to your home and advise you on how to make it more secure.
- If you move into a new home you should change the front and back door locks immediately. If you lose your keys, or if they are 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 system for your front door.
- Every home should have at least one smoke alarm and/or a burglar alarm, make sure you use them. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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, try to make access around the back of the house difficult for unwanted visitors. Keep bins and ladders out of sight as these can be used to gain access to your property. To keep the front of the house clear and visible, so unwanted visitors don’t have anywhere 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. Got a home phone or a burglar alarm, make sure you use them. 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 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 them in.
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- Gadgets can help protect your home and garden from burglars. Advances in technology mean it is now cheaper to buy security cameras with outside lights and burglar alarms that work with apps on your phone. This will enable you to keep an eye on your house when you’re away. There are also indoor cameras, smart deadbolt locks, and smart doorknobs you can purchase which will link to your smartphone. You can even purchase smart padlocks that can be locked and unlocked from your phone for sheds and porch doors.
- 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.
- 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. If you are going away, tell someone you trust where you are going and when you will be back.
- 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. Thieves could fish for them through the letterbox. Put in a letter catcher so burglars can’t peer through the letterbox or fish for keys.
- If you leave the house empty, ask a friend or neighbour to open and close your curtains or blinds in the mornings and evenings. Using a time-switch for your lights and radios makes it seem that the house is occupied. These can be bought from hardware shops and other high street retailers.
- If you keep your keys in a pocket rather than a bag you can still get into your house if your bag is stolen. Avoid having your keys and your address in your bag at the same time.
- It is better to say: ‘No one is available to take your call.’
If you live in rented accommodation your landlord must keep the property you live in safe and free from health hazards. They must make sure the gas equipment they supply is safely installed and maintained by a Gas Safe registered engineer. They must also have a registered engineer do an annual gas safety check on each appliance and flue and give you a copy of the gas safety check record before you move in, or within 28 days of the check. They must also make sure the electrical system is safe (sockets and light fittings), and all appliances they supply are safe (cookers and kettles).

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 50291. 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.

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.

If you live in rented accommodation it is also your landlord’s responsibility to follow safety regulations by providing a smoke alarm on each storey and a carbon monoxide alarm in rooms with a usable fireplace or wood burner, check you have access to escape routes at all times and make sure the furniture and furnishings they supply are fire safe. They must also provide fire alarms and extinguishers if the property is a large house in multiple occupation (HMHO).

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 are often caused by household appliances, so it’s important to check for any signs that they have become a potential hazard. The use of correct fuses prevents overheating, which can also be caused by overloading 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.

In the event of a fire:

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 a room with 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.

How to report a gas leak
If you smell gas anywhere, either in the house or in the street, call the freephone National Gas Service Emergency Line on +44 (0)902 111 999. 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 generally 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.

Pay attention to your surroundings (especially if you travel to new areas or trips or vacations) and plan your stay before you travel. Hotels can order taxis for you and give you directions to your accommodation, find suitable and safe routes to the hotel, and offer information on local areas. It is advisable to avoid high-risk situations such as walking late at night in unfamiliar areas. The suggestions that follow are not intended to alarm, but to remind you to always be alert on the streets of the UK, although you should always be aware of your surroundings and use your common sense wherever you are.

Make sure you carry a mobile phone with you or take 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 turns your mobile phone into a personal safety alarm is available from as little as £4.99 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 alerts can be set in advance – for example, if a person fails to get home at a particular time. Users can also send a text to trigger an alarm if they get into trouble. Text You Home obtains the location of the user from 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 at www.textyouhome.com/personal/

The Aircover and TRACKR mobile apps also offer security, including finding your phone if it is lost, backing up your contacts and photographs, locating family or friends and notifying them in urgent situations and can also remove viruses and protect your mobile from threats to security.

Be alert and be brief when using a mobile phone. Be discreet and try to conceal it. Don’t wander along with your earphones on or follow a smartphone’s satellite navigation system as this could indicate to others that you have expensive personal possessions with you or that you are not alert. If you use public transport late at night, use it.

Facing outwards when using a public telephone means that people who are following you can see what is going on around you. You can see what is going on around you (especially if you travel to new areas or trips or vacations) and plan your stay before you travel. Hotels can order taxis for you and give you directions to your accommodation, find suitable and safe routes to the hotel, and offer information on local areas. It is advisable to avoid high-risk situations such as walking late at night in unfamiliar areas. The suggestions that follow are not intended to alarm, but to remind you to always be alert on the streets of the UK.

Try to find and use routes that are well lit and busy.

Walk confidently on the pavement, facing oncoming traffic. When crossing the road, remember that vehicles move into your accommodation, find suitable and safe routes to the hotel, and offer information on local areas. It is advisable to avoid high-risk situations such as walking late at night in unfamiliar areas. The suggestions that follow are not intended to alarm, but to remind you to always be alert on the streets of the UK, although you should always be aware of your surroundings and use your common sense wherever you are.

Many international students are surprised the UK does not have street lighting everywhere. When you first move into your accommodation, find suitable and safe routes to the hotel, and offer information on local areas. It is advisable to avoid high-risk situations such as walking late at night in unfamiliar areas. The suggestions that follow are not intended to alarm, but to remind you to always be alert on the streets of the UK, although you should always be aware of your surroundings and use your common sense wherever you are.

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. Never write down your PIN (personal identification number) to access your money from a cash machine. Never write down your PIN (personal identification number) to access your money from a cash machine. Always memorise your PIN (personal identification number) to access your money from a cash machine. Never write down your PIN (personal identification number) to access your money from a cash machine. Always memorise your PIN (personal identification number) to access your money from a cash machine.

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 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.

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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 others living there.
USING TAXIS

There will probably be times when you need to take a taxi during your stay in the UK – for instance, before or after a night out. If you don’t feel safe walking, especially late at night, use a taxi. Even if there is a group of friends it makes more sense to use a taxi and share the cost.

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, the hotel you are staying in, or your friends to recommend a taxi company. Keep the telephone number handy, and remember, 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.

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. Put out your hand for the bus to stop for you. 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 someone to meet you at the bus stop if you are travelling late and have a long way to walk.

◆◆ If you can, take a taxi rather than walk the streets with a smartphone’s satellite navigation system or a road map and/or 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 train 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 +44 (0)800 40 50 40 or text 61016.

◆◆ 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 train. 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.

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◆◆ If you want, you can ask your taxi driver to wait until you have entered your house safely, before they drive away.
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 bookshops or read it online at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code.

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 can still be over the drink drive limit the next morning. The legal drink-drive limit in Scotland is lower than elsewhere in the UK. The legal alcohol limit north of the border recently changed from 80mg in every 100ml of blood to 50mg. Driving under the influence of certain drugs, including some common medicines, came into force in 2015. These changes state that it is an offence to drive with certain drugs in your system above a specified level, even if your driving ability is not impaired.

◆◆ 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 within a period of three years.

◆◆ New drivers will have their licences revoked if they clock up six penalty points in their first two years of driving, rather than the normal 12 points.

◆◆ You must observe the minimum age limits; the minimum age for driving a car or riding a motorcycle is 17.

◆◆ It is illegal to read a text or check social media on your phone when you are behind the wheel. You are allowed to use fully hands-free phones while driving but you are forbidden from touching or picking it up, even for a moment. The law now specifically states that it is illegal to hold a mobile phone to follow a map and find out directions. If you need to use your phone you must park your car safely and switch off your engine.

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 it was issued. Information can be found at https://www.gov.uk/driving-nongb-licence.

For international students from outside the European Economic Area (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 is 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.

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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.

NOTE: It is vital that you purchase a cycle helmet that meets the British Standard. Use lights if possible at all times and wear fluorescent and reflective jackets. Never listen to music or use a mobile phone while you are on your bike as it will distract you. Fit your bike with a bell and purchase a secure lock.

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. Look before moving off or stopping and indicate when turning. Be aware of car doors opening, pedestrians stepping out and emergency vehicles. 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 https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code

Complicated junctions need great experience and confidence in road cycling. Practical training or cycling with an experienced friend will help this build 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 find your way around your new locality.

Remember, pedestrians have the right of way on pedestrian crossings, but it is always safer to wait until the traffic has seen you and stopped.

Smoking in cars carrying anyone under the age of 18 is illegal.

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 and 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 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, 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.

© Mat Wright
**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, fail to 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 magistrates’ court. If you do not respond to this a police officer may arrest you. If you are arrested this link gives you details about your rights: [https://www.gov.uk/police-powers-of-arrest-your-rights](https://www.gov.uk/police-powers-of-arrest-your-rights)

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 stolen goods. If you are stopped in the street this link gives you details about your rights: [https://www.gov.uk/police-powers-to-stop-and-search-your-rights](https://www.gov.uk/police-powers-to-stop-and-search-your-rights)

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 alcohol-related 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 a magistrate for an extension. If you are arrested, contact your institution 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.gov.uk/legal-aid](https://www.gov.uk/legal-aid) or telephone +44 (0)845 345 4345.

- **Citizens Advice Bureau** at [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) – they provide free, confidential and independent advice in their offices, and at colleges and other institutions across the UK.

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**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 and amphetamines.

- It is illegal to carry any sort of weapon including knives, self-defence CS gas sprays, guns and stun guns.

- You must be 18 and over to buy tobacco and smoking is prohibited in workplaces and substantially enclosed public places.

- It is an illegal offence for anyone under the age of 18 to purchase alcohol or to have alcohol purchased for them.

- Only people over 18 can drink in public, except in areas of towns where Designated Public Place Orders (DPPOs) are in place. Even outside these areas, the police can take away alcohol. In the Strathclyde region of Scotland the consumption of alcohol in public places is illegal.

- Never buy property that you think might be stolen, no matter how tempting a bargain it might seem. You can check the background history of any used electrical items at [www.checkmend.com](http://www.checkmend.com) either by creating a single report or by SMS.

- You can find an essential guide to the law in the UK at [www.gov.uk/browse/justice](https://www.gov.uk/browse/justice)

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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 Equality Act works towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality between people. It lists nine protected areas: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

If you are subjected to any form of unfair treatment, discrimination or harassment linked to any of these areas report it to your institution. They will have a formal procedure to assist individuals who feel they have been discriminated against. You can also seek support from the Equality Advisory Support Service who will provide information and advice to anyone who thinks they have suffered discrimination or harassment.

You can contact the Equality Advisory Support Service on +44 (0)808 800 0082 or through their website www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

WELL-BEING

Whatever the problem, you’re never alone. You can always ask for help in confidence. There are many organisations who have staff who are trained to offer advice and support to those who are experiencing personal problems.

You can always contact www.samaritans.org.uk or call 116 123 FREE anytime, from any phone, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

You can also contact the Papyrus HOPELineUK. It also gives confidential suicide prevention advice and support to young people and others worried about them.

+44 (0)800 068 4141
Text +44 (0)7786 209697
pat@papyrus-uk.org

HATE CRIME

Hate crime is defined as any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person’s disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or perceived disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender.

The police also record hate incidents, which are defined as any non-crime incident which is perceived by the victim or any other person to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person’s disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or perceived disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender.

Hate crime can take many forms, including:

- physical attacks
- damage to property, including offensive graffiti and arson
- abusive telephone calls, leaflets/posters, letters, emails or postings on social media
- verbal abuse, including abusive gestures.

Hate crime or hate incidents can occur at home or close to home, in public – such as on the street, in public facilities or public transport – or even while at school, college or university.

Why should you report hate crime?

Hate crimes and incidents hurt; they can be confusing and frightening. Hate incidents can feel like crimes to those who suffer them and can escalate to crimes.

By reporting a hate crime, the police will be able to fully investigate what happened. In relation to hate incidents, the police also encourage reporting, as while the police can only prosecute when the law is broken, they can still work with partners to try and prevent any escalation in seriousness.

By reporting you will also get the service you deserve and the support you need and you may be able to prevent these incidents from happening to someone else. You will also help the police understand the extent of hate crime and incidents in your local area so they can better respond to it.

The police will deal with your report promptly and sensitively, respect your views and treat them professionally and will keep you informed of any progress or outcome.

Hate crime in any form is wrong. That is why it is important that if hate crime happens to you or someone you know, that you report it.

Reporting makes a difference – to you, your friends and your community.

http://report-it.org.uk/report_a_hate_crime
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

British Insurance Brokers’ Association
Information about insurance and insurance providers in the UK.
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

Childalert.co.uk
Comprehensive advice and personal safety guidance for children.
www.childalert.co.uk

Citizens Advice
The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their financial, legal and other problems by providing information and advice.
www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Community Legal Service Direct
Access to free legal information and advice.
www.gov.uk/legal-aid

Crime statistics
The world’s first nationwide street-by-street crime maps are now available in England and Wales.
www.police.uk

Crimestoppers
The charity Crimestoppers runs the +44 (0)800 555 111 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

DirectGov
Lots of useful safety advice and tips regarding crime prevention and self-defence.
www.gov.uk/browse/justice

Drinkaware.co.uk
For the facts about alcohol.
www.drinkaware.co.uk

Drinkline
Advice on sensible drinking and alcohol misuse.
https://patient.info/support/drinkline
Helpline: +44 (0)300 123 1110 (Monday – Friday 09.00–20.00, weekends 11.00–14.00)

Equality and Human Rights Commission
Offers support and advice in cases of racial discrimination or harassment.
www.equalityhumanrights.com
+44 (0)808 800 0082

Gamble Aware
Promotes responsible gambling only and supports initiatives that help prevent gambling from becoming a problem and minimise gambling-related harm. Gamble Aware is administered by the Responsible Gambling Trust.
www.gambleaware.co.uk

Get Safe Online
Advice on how to keep yourself safe online.
www.getsafeline.org

Highway Code
Advice on traffic law in the UK.
http://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code

Home Office
The Home Office has a website giving practical advice on protecting yourself against identity theft.
www.actionfraud.police.uk/fraud_protection/identity_fraud
Why Act

The police and the security and intelligence agencies depend on information from the public. By looking out for suspicious activity and reporting it to the police, in confidence, the public can help keep themselves, their family and their local community safe. They may see or hear something that could be that vital piece of information needed to stop a terrorist attack.

Although terrorism is rare in the UK, recent events clearly demonstrate that an attack could happen at any time or place without warning. The current threat to the UK stands at severe, which means an attack is highly likely.

By working together with the police, staying alert and thinking about your safety and security at home or when you are out and about, you can make it harder for terrorists to plan or carry out an attack.

You should report suspicious activity or behaviour – anything that seems out of place, unusual or just doesn’t seem to fit in with everyday life.

ACT ACTION COUNTERS TERRORISM

https://act.campaign.gov.uk/

These are just some examples of suspicious activity and behaviour which could potentially be terrorist related:

- Anyone hiring or acquiring large vehicles or similar for no obvious reason.
- Anyone buying or storing a large amount of chemicals, fertilisers or gas cylinders for no obvious reason.
- Anyone taking notes or photos of security arrangements, or inspecting CCTV in an unusual way.
- Anyone visiting the dark web, ordering unusual items online or carrying out unusual bank transactions.
- Anyone who has illegal firearms or other weapons or has shown an interest in obtaining them.
- Anyone holding passports or other documents in different names, for no obvious reasons.
- Anyone who goes away travelling for long periods of time but is vague about where they’re going.

Report potentially crucial information about suspicious activity confidentially to the police free on +44 (0)800 789 321.

If you would prefer to report information online rather than over the phone, you can do so via www.gov.uk/act

Always remember, if something is occurring now, call 999.