

Coming to the UK

Unless your child is a national of one of the countries of the European Economic Area, they will need a student visa to enter the UK

The UK has long welcomed students from overseas. Entering the country in order to study is straightforward as long as international students can produce the correct documentation. Help is available at every stage from the UK Border Agency (www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk), visa application centres (go to www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/howtoapply/wheretosapply to view a list of these) and/or the British Mission/Embassy/High Commission/Consulate-General in your own country (see www.fco.gov.uk for a list).

The school at which your child is to study will also be eager to help and many have a designated international co-ordinator who can advise you. Some schools also arrange informal seminars overseas in order to help parents understand the school's application procedure and the UK's entry requirements.

UK entry clearance

Entry clearance is literally that: every student, regardless of age or subject of study, must obtain permission to enter the UK in order to study. The only exceptions are students with a British passport or nationals of the countries of the European Economic Area (EEA). All countries that are members of the European Union (EU) are also members of the EEA, as are Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Switzerland is a member of neither, but an international treaty gives Swiss nationals the same right to study in the UK as EEA nationals.

Non-EEA nationals are granted permission to study in the UK in the form of a student visa (and are therefore sometimes referred to as 'visa nationals'). Since 31 March 2009, visa applications have had to be made using the points-based student route (see opposite for details).

Students intending to study in the UK on a course lasting fewer than six months may enter the UK as a student visitor providing they can show immigration officers that they have been accepted for a course of study offered by a licensed sponsor. (A list of schools and colleges licensed to sponsor international students can be downloaded from

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk/adult-students/approved-education-provider.) They may not apply for a transfer from a short course to one that is longer than six months from within the UK.

The visa letter

An important part of applying for a visa is the visa letter, which can only be sent by a licensed sponsor and is sent to you by your child's school. The school will advise you what documents you need to produce to prove your child's competence for the course for which they are applying, plus your own ability to support them financially.

The visa letter should be on the school's headed notepaper and signed by the school's representative. It should contain:

- your child's name and nationality
- your contact details
- the school's licence number
- the address and contact details for where your child will be studying
- confirmation that the school is providing accommodation
- the title of the course, start date and expected end date
- boarding fees, including those already paid
- for children aged 16 or 17, the level or type of qualification and its awarding body.

The visa letter forms a very important part of the application process, but is not an acceptable substitute for the visa itself.

The visa

Once you have received the visa letter you should complete a visa application form which, for most countries, may be completed online via the Visa4UK website (www.visa4uk.fco.gov.uk). You will need:

- the visa letter
- the documents you submitted to the school for the issue of the visa letter
- a letter from yourself as their parents or legal guardians giving your written consent to the care arrangements for your child's travel to the UK, reception on arrival and care whilst in the UK
- your child's passport
- the visa fee, paid in your local currency (see www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/howtoapply/visafees)
- a photograph, conforming to internationally agreed standards (see www.ukvisas.gov.uk/resources/en/docs/12160810/Photoguide)
- proof that you have the tuition fees and funds for living costs (see www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/howtoapply/infos/inf29pbsstudent).

All visa applicants must also provide biometric information, which can be taken at visa application centres, British Mission/Embassy/High Commission/Consulate-General or in some cases by officials in your own country. The process involves your child pressing his/her fingers onto a glass plate for them to be scanned. They will also be photographed. Headcoverings worn for religious, cultural or medical reasons are permitted in photographs, but your child's face must be clearly visible. The whole process should take less than five minutes and special arrangements are made for female applicants if required.



Getting the timing right

Obtaining the necessary clearances can be slow and depends partly on the country and partly on the time of year; applications usually take longer in the summer months when many people are applying. The UK Border Agency aims to process all visas within 60 working days, with around 80% of student visas processed in about three weeks.

Travelling to the UK

Parents should arrange their children's travel to the UK, and should keep the school informed about travel arrangements. Schools take their responsibility for pupils very seriously, so must know where and when they are coming and going. Many schools arrange for international students to be met at airports and/or train stations and organise their onward journey to school.

School dates are circulated a year in advance, so that parents can make sure their children arrive and leave on the correct days. Students are expected to arrive ready to start work on the first day of term and are also expected to stay until the last day of term as important parts of the curriculum are scheduled for those times.

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Insurance

Travel insurance is usually available when you buy international travel tickets; travel agents and insurance brokers can advise you. If you book travel tickets online, some airlines include insurance automatically, some have a click-on option for insurance and some don't mention insurance at all. You may also need to arrange insurance to cover your child's personal belongings whether brought to the UK or purchased there. Your own insurance policy may cover personal items while overseas, or you may need to arrange additional cover.

Health insurance is not usually necessary as the UK's National Health Service (NHS) provides free and universal medical treatment to which international students are entitled if they are on a course that lasts six months or more (or a full-time course of any length in Scotland). You may, however, need to pay for dental or optical treatment and any medicines prescribed for your child.

International students who are in the UK for less than six months may also be treated free of charge if they are from a country that has a reciprocal health agreement with the UK. For further information, you can download the *Keeping Healthy* Information Sheet from the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) website (www.ukcisa.org.uk). Details of NHS entitlement change from time to time, so you should check with the British Mission/Embassy/High Commission/Consulate-General in your own country before your child travels to the UK.

Although you may not need insurance for medical treatment it is sometimes worth taking out insurance to cover possible additional costs resulting from illness. Such costs could include lost or additional fees if your child is unable to complete their course or has to repeat part of it, or travel costs if you wish to visit them if they fall ill.

What to bring

Your child's school will send pre-departure information advising you what your child should bring with them when they travel to the UK. The following may also be useful:

In hand luggage

Many airlines have strict regulations about what may be carried on board. Make sure you know the regulations, as anything packed in hand luggage that is not permitted may be confiscated at the airport of departure.

Important items to include in your child's hand luggage are:

- passport, visa and tickets
- visa letter and letter of acceptance from the school
- documentary evidence of your ability to pay the school fees
- qualification certificates if relevant
- insurance papers
- address and contact details of your child's school, plus information about when and where your child is to be met and by whom
- money – a small amount of British money, traveller's cheques, credit card (preferably in a money belt or a very secure inside pocket)
- a list of important items included in your child's main luggage in case it gets lost and you need to make an insurance claim
- medical documentation including vaccination certificates and doctors' letters if necessary.

In addition, if your child needs to take medication prescribed by your own doctor, get a letter from the doctor in English explaining exactly what the medication is and why your child takes it. This will allow your child to bring a small supply of the medication into the UK and means that they'll have a record to show their school's doctor, so that they can continue receiving treatment.

In main luggage

Choose a suitcase or backpack that your child can carry easily, and try not to pack too much; they will be able to buy most things in the UK and storage space can be limited at school. The main items your child will need to bring are casual clothes and some favourite personal possessions.

The school will advise on whether students can bring their own music systems, computers, mobile phones, etc. If they can, you should check that electrical equipment is compatible with the UK standards – it may need an adaptor or voltage converter. If your child does bring audio or computer equipment with them they should also bring a receipt showing where and when it was purchased. The receipt will help prove to customs officials that the items are for personal use and not being imported for sale. Personal items are exempt from customs duty.

Important items to pack include photocopies of all the documentation carried in hand luggage, notes of the numbers of your child's traveller's cheques, and a small amount of spare cash.

There are certain things your child is not allowed to bring into the UK. Some items are obvious, others such as certain foods less so. A complete list can be obtained from the British Mission/Embassy/High Commission/Consulate-General in your own country. ■

Points-based system

Students must obtain certain documents for which they will be awarded points. 40 points are required for a visa application:

Points	What the points are for	Proof and documents required
30	Being accepted for study on a course at an approved provider of education (also known as a licensed sponsor).	Visa letter from the licensed sponsor (eg school), plus the supporting documents used to obtain the visa letter if your child is aged 16 or 17.
10	Maintenance funds (ie having enough money to cover school fees plus living costs).	Bank statement or letter confirming there is enough money to cover your child's costs for up to one year, at the time of the application. The statement must show that the money has been in the account for at least 28 days.