

# Applying for a student visa

## What is this guidance about?

This guidance explains what you will need to do if you want to travel to the United Kingdom (UK) to study, and what the [Immigration Rules](#) say. It is only a guide but it aims to answer some common questions.

## Student rules changes from 1 September 2007

A new entry clearance (visa) category of student visitor has been introduced for short term students who come to the United Kingdom to study on courses of six month duration or less.

## What is a visa?

A visa is a certificate that is put into your passport or travel document by an Entry Clearance Officer at a British mission overseas. The visa gives you permission to enter the UK.

If you have a valid UK visa, we will not normally refuse you entry to the UK unless your circumstances have changed, or you gave false information or did not tell us important facts when you applied for your visa.

When you arrive in the UK, an Immigration Officer may ask you questions, so take all relevant documents in your hand luggage.

## How do I qualify to travel to the UK as a student?

You must be able to show that you have been accepted on a course of study at an educational establishment that is on the UK's Department for children schools and families Register of Education and Training Providers. Contact details are under 'More advice and information' at the end of this guidance, or you can search the register on the Department for children, schools and families website at: [www.dfes.gov.uk/providersregister](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/providersregister)

You must be able to show that you are going to follow:

- a recognised full-time degree course, or
- a course run during the week involving at least 15 hours of organised daytime study each week, or
- a full-time course at an independent fee-paying school

You must also:

- be able to pay for your course and support yourself and any dependants, and live in the UK without going into business or getting a job, or needing any help from public funds
- be able and intend to follow your chosen course, and
- intend to leave the UK when you complete your studies, if your course of study is below degree level.

If you graduated from a UK university or other educational institution in the last 12 months with a bachelor's degree (second class honours or above), masters degree or PhD in certain subjects, you can apply to stay in the UK and get a job for an extra year after your degree course finishes, without getting a work permit. For more information, please see the section on Science and engineering graduates in our [Permit free employment \(INF 14\)](#) guidance.

## Do I need a visa to study in the UK?

You will need a visa if you:

- are not an EEA national
- are stateless (you don't have a nationality)
- hold a non-national travel document, or
- hold a passport issued by an authority that is not recognised in the UK

If you do not intend to work or stay in the UK for more than six months, you might wish to consider entering as a student visitor. More information is available on this website or from your nearest [British mission overseas](#) where there is a visa section.

If you do not need an entry clearance as a student visitor, you will have to satisfy the Immigration Officer that you qualify for entry to study when you arrive in the UK. You must be able to show that you have been accepted on a course of study at an educational establishment that is on the Register of Education and

Training Providers. They will then give you permission to stay in the UK for up to six months. You will not be allowed to extend your stay in the UK as a student unless you arrived with a student visa or prospective student visa.

To extend your stay you will need to apply for a residence permit at the Border and Immigration Agency. (Contact details are under 'More advice and information' at the end of this guidance.) The Border and Immigration Agency will charge a non-refundable fee for any application you make to extend your stay in the UK.

If you have any doubts about whether you qualify for entry, you should apply for a visa before you travel to the UK.

### **How do I apply for a visa?**

You can apply in a number of ways, for example by post, by courier, in person and online. The visa section will tell you about the ways in which you can apply.

Some visa sections will only accept applications made online. To find out if you can apply for your visa online please visit [www.visa4uk.fco.gov.uk](http://www.visa4uk.fco.gov.uk)

If you cannot apply online you will need to fill in a visa application form (VAF 1 - non-settlement). You can get a form from this website, or get one free of charge from your nearest [British mission overseas](#) where there is a visa section.

You should apply for a student visa in the country of which you are a national or where you legally live.

In some countries, if you are applying for a visa to stay in the UK for more than six months, you may need to be tested for active tuberculosis before we will accept your application. You can find out if you need to be tested by using the [Do I need a UK visa?](#) on this website, or by contacting your nearest [British mission overseas](#) where there is a visa section.

### **What will I need to make my application?**

You will need to make your application online or fill in the following visa application form:

You will also need the following.

- Your passport or travel document.
- A recent passport-sized (45mm x 35mm), colour photograph of yourself. This should be:
  - taken against a light-coloured background
  - clear and of good quality, and not framed or backed
  - printed on normal photographic paper, and
  - full face and without sunglasses, hat or other head covering unless you wear this for cultural or religious reasons
- The visa fee. This cannot be refunded and you must normally pay it in the local currency of the country where you are applying.
- Supporting documents relevant to your application.

### **What are visa application centres?**

In some countries, we are working with commercial companies to run visa application centres (VACs). The VACs are in largely populated areas, making it easier and more convenient for people to apply for a UK visa. Trained staff at each VAC deal with all visa enquiries and applications. They collect your biometric information (see the relevant section of this leaflet) along with the relevant fees, and provide unbiased, face-to-face advice on the application process, including whether or not you have included all the necessary documents. Entry clearance staff at the British mission will then consider your application and decide whether to issue or refuse your visa. VAC staff have no say in this decision.

### **What is 'biometric' information?**

In some countries currently - and in all countries by April 2008 - you will need to provide 'biometric' information as part of the visa application process. This biometric information consists of scans of all 10 of your fingers and a full-face digital photograph. You will have to go to the nearest VAC in person to provide this biometric information. In those countries where there is no VAC, you will need to go to the British mission. Your visa applications will not be processed until you have provided the necessary biometric information. The finger scans are electronic so staff do not need to use any ink, liquid or chemicals. You will have your digital photograph taken at the same time and the whole procedure should take no more than five minutes to complete. You should make sure that you do not have any decoration (such as henna), or any cuts or other

markings on your fingertips before having your finger scans. You should also make sure that if you have any cuts and bruises on your face, they have healed or disappeared before you have your photograph taken. Digital photographs must be of your full face and you should not wear sunglasses, a hat or any other head covering (unless you wear it for cultural or religious reasons).

#### **What supporting documents should I include with my application?**

You should include all the documents you can to show that you qualify for entry to the UK as a student. If you do not, we may refuse your application.

As a guide, you should include:

- any relevant diplomas or educational certificates that you have
- a letter from the university, college or school confirming that you have been accepted on a course of study in the UK, and a statement of charges for the course
- evidence of government sponsorship (if appropriate)
- bank statements, payslips or other evidence to show that you can pay for your stay and your course of studies in the UK, and
- if you are being privately sponsored (for example, by a college in the UK) a letter from your sponsor giving details of how they will support you during your studies, and evidence that they can do so.

**We will refuse your application if we find that any documents are forged.**

#### **What will happen when I make my application?**

The Entry Clearance Officer will try to make a decision using your application form and the supporting documents you have provided. If this is not possible, they will need to interview you.

Please check your visa when you get it. You should make sure that:

- your personal details are correct
- it correctly states the purpose for which you want to come to the UK, and
- it is valid for the date on which you want to travel. (You can ask for it to be post-dated for up to three months if you do not plan to travel immediately.)

If you think there is anything wrong with your visa, contact the visa section immediately.

#### **Can I work?**

You can take part-time or holiday work, but you must not:

- work for more than 20 hours a week during term time unless your placement is part of your studies, has been agreed with your educational institution and leads to a degree or qualification awarded by a nationally recognised examining body
- do business, be self-employed or provide services as a professional sportsperson or entertainer, or
- work full-time in a permanent job.

If you are coming to the UK as a student for six months or less, you must ask the Entry Clearance Officer (or the Immigration Officer if you do not need an entry clearance) for permission to work.

#### **When should I apply?**

You should apply in good time for your entry clearance so that you are not delayed in getting into the UK. However, you cannot have your clearance post-dated by more than three months. It can get very busy in visa sections, especially over the summer when lots of students are applying.