

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PRE-ARRIVAL GUIDE

PROBLEM
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 Birkbeck
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



Studying abroad is exciting, especially if you are doing it for the first time. Arriving in a new country, making friends from diverse cultures, and learning new subjects are just some of the changes you will be going through. In 2021, with new travel restrictions in place across the globe, studying internationally can present some challenges. This pre-arrival guide will help you to prepare for the new academic year in London, advise you on what you must do when you arrive in England and what you should prioritise to make a successful start of your year.

BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

- **Traffic Light System, PCR Tests and Quarantining** - This year, students coming to England from abroad will be required to follow the [UK Government's traffic light system](#) to enter the country. What you must do will depend on where you have been in the 10 days before arriving in England. Depending on whether you are coming from a red, amber or green list country, you will need to follow specific advice on taking PCR tests, quarantining in designated hotels or in your student accommodation. Before you make your travel arrangements, you should always consult the [UK Government's website](#) to make sure you are following the correct guidance. Please remember that if you are coming through or from a red list country you must book a [designated quarantine hotel and PCR tests before you travel](#).
- **Reimbursement of the quarantine and PCR test costs** – Birkbeck will reimburse the costs associated with mandatory hotel quarantine and mandatory COVID-19 tests upon arrival which are in line with the Government Guidance. You can find more about our terms and conditions on our [website](#).
- **Passenger locator form** - Before travelling to the UK, you must also complete a Passenger Locator Form. The form must be completed 48 hours before you travel. Upon completion, you will have the option of printing it and/or emailing a copy to yourself. You will need to show the completed form when checking in, in your home country, and at the UK border, when you enter the UK. If you do not complete the form, you can be fined or denied entrance in England. To find out more and to complete the form before you travel, visit the [UK Government website](#).
- **Arrive early where possible** – We are encouraging internationally domiciled students coming from or through red and amber list countries to arrive in London by 18 September where possible. This should allow them enough time to quarantine in a designated hotel for 10 days following the UK Government's guidance and join their programmes at the beginning of the academic year, on 4 October 2021.
- **Accommodation** – Our rooms in the University of London's [halls of residence](#) are near our campus, so you are never more than 15 minutes from our teaching, and social facilities. If you are studying full time, you can apply for a room at the [intercollegiate halls](#). If you have applied for accommodation, met the conditions of your course offer and accepted your place at Birkbeck, you will be contacted by email to confirm your accommodation. We will always do our best to meet your preferences if your specific room type is available.

UPON ARRIVAL

- **Face covering** – Since 19 July 2021, wearing a face covering is no longer a legal requirement in England. However, in London, you will still need to wear one when using public transport. You can use a face mask, a scarf, a bandana, or hand-made cloth mask, as long as it safely covers the nose and mouth. The same rule applies if you are accessing or visiting a healthcare setting. Although this is not a legal requirement, big supermarket chains, such as Aldi, Lidl, Morrisons, Tesco, Sainsbury's, and Waitrose are still encouraging customers to wear a face covering when shopping in their stores. You can visit the [UK Government website](#) on face coverings for more information.
- **Using public transport, taxis, and private hire vehicles** - One of the easiest ways to get around London is via public transport. You can start familiarising yourself with underground and train lines by visiting the [TFL website](#). You can choose to use the tube (the famous London underground), a train, an iconic London black cab or any private hire vehicles such as [Uber](#), [Bolt](#) or [Ola](#) to get from any London airport to your accommodation, depending on your preference or budget. Once you are in town, you can use apps such as [City Mapper](#) to plan your journeys.

YOUR VISA AND REGISTRATION IN THE UK

- **Student Visa Registration** – Registering your Student Visa and completing online registration is an important task before you begin studying. Details of how to register have been sent to all those with a CAS. If you have not received this, please contact isa@bbk.ac.uk.
- **Student Visa and BRP (Biometric Residence Permit) card** – If you are coming to Birkbeck under a Student Visa and have obtained your Visa from outside the UK, you should have received a vignette (sticker) on your passport, which should be valid for 90 days. The actual duration of your Student Visa will be featured on a BRP (Biometric Resident Permit) card, which you must collect before the end of 90 days, instead of the normal 10 days of arrival, from a named Post Office branch. Clear instructions are included in your 'decision letter'. If you arrive late in the UK or cannot collect your BRP card (e.g. you need to self-isolate, your Post Office branch is closed due to the pandemic) do not panic. Instead, contact the International Student Administration team on isa@bbk.ac.uk and we will be able to help you.
- **EU Nationals and British Overseas Nationals** – If you are coming to Birkbeck on a Student Visa you may not have a vignette in your passport, but instead have a Share Code. These can be generated to demonstrate your ability to study in the UK using the [Prove Status web page](#).
- **Registering with the police** - depending on your nationality, you will also need to register with the police within 7 days of arrival to the UK. This information will be on your Visa decision letter or on your vignette. In cases in which you are required to self-isolate (e.g. you came from or through a red or amber list country), you must not leave your accommodation to register with the police. If your address is in London, you can book an appointment for the Police Registration at the [Overseas Visitors Records Office website](#). Your appointment date may be more than 7 days after your arrival to the UK but it should not affect you if you book an appointment within 7 days of arrival to the UK. If you live outside London, you can find where to register by visiting the [UK Government website](#). The ISA team can also be contacted for some support.

- **Accessing the National Health Service (NHS)** – It has never been more important to register with a local GP (General Practice), so you can have access to a doctor when you feel unwell or have an existing health problem that has gotten worse. Birkbeck students can use the Gower Street practice by registering online. If you prefer to register with a GP near your accommodation, you can always visit the [NHS website to locate your local GP](#). Appointments with a GP and most of NHS hospital treatments are free in the UK. As an international student you would have paid for the immigration health surcharge before submitting your Student Visa application. You may, however, still need to pay a standard fee for all doctor-prescribed medication, dental and optical treatments. If you become unwell before registering with your local GP, you can visit [NHS Walk-in services](#) near you, call **111** or dial **999** if you are in an emergency.
- **COVID-19 vaccination** - The COVID-19 vaccination is being offered to everyone aged 16 or over in the UK for free, regardless of their nationality or immigration status. If you will be or have been vaccinated in your home country, you should seek medical advice after registering with a GP or at a local GP practice even without registering. For more information on COVID-19 vaccinations in London, how to book or what to do if you have already received one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine outside England, you can [visit the NHS FAQ page](#) for students or call **119**.

GETTING YOUR BASIC NEEDS SORTED

- **UK bank accounts** – You may wish to open a UK bank account to spend and receive money while studying in London. Most traditional banks would normally ask you to book an appointment and visit a branch in person to open an account for you. After the process is completed, your bank card will be posted to your home address which can normally take 5 working days or more. If you cannot visit a branch (e.g. no appointments are available, or you are self-isolating) you might want to open a digital bank account to get you going during your first weeks in London. You can quickly open one online, from a computer or a mobile phone. Some of the most popular digital banks in the UK are [Monzo](#), which will deliver a bank card to your UK address; [Monese](#), that does not require an UK address, as well as [Revolut](#) and [Starling Bank](#) which offer multi-currency accounts.
- **Food and household items** - If you are coming to London for the first time, you will probably need to get some of your basics sorted. The big branches of the main UK supermarkets, such as [ASDA](#), [Tesco](#), [Sainsbury's](#), [Marks & Spencer](#) and [Waitrose](#), will normally sell products such as duvets, bed sheets, basic kitchen appliances, stationery, and adaptors for your electronic devices. The smaller branches do not normally offer those, so it is always worth checking first. All of them sell online. Other big stores selling accessible homeware products are [Homebase](#), [Argos](#), [Primark](#), [TK Maxx](#), [IKEA](#), [Wilko](#).
- **Getting your mobile SIM Card** - The UK's biggest mobile networks are [Three](#), [O2](#), [Vodafone](#), and [EE](#), and they all offer what is called 'SIM only' deals, so you can use their network on your own mobile phone if it is not locked or buy them from supermarket. That is how you can get a UK telephone number without having to invest money on a new device. [Giffgaff](#) and [Smarty](#) are also very good and practical options. You can order and activate your SIM card online. [Carphone Warehouse](#) is a large mobile retailer and they can help you to compare plans and prices. You can also look up deals online using websites such as [Money Saving Expert](#).