



A practical and cultural guide for international students in the UK

Anthony Cutler and Jill Doubleday





Contents

Introduction.....	3
1 Taking Off.....	4
2 Touching Down.....	5
3 Feeling at Home	7
UK families.....	7
Your host family.....	7
How can you fit in with your host family?.....	8
A house tour.....	8
Your room.....	8
The sitting room.....	9
The dining area.....	9
The kitchen.....	10
Food.....	11
The bathroom.....	15
The garden.....	16
The British and their pets.....	16
4 Feeling at Home in a Student Residence.....	17
5 Sharing Accommodation.....	24
6 Learning in the UK.....	26
7 Social Life and Society.....	31
Living with a family in Britain.....	31
Making friends.....	33
Leisure activities.....	34
Relations between men and women.....	37
The weather and what people wear.....	37
A democratic society.....	38
The state, public services and the law.....	38
8 Important information.....	40
Applications, passports and visas.....	40
Money and Insurance.....	40
Immigration and work permits.....	42
Going through Customs.....	42
Travel in Britain.....	43
Your Safety.....	43
More useful links.....	44



Welcome!

It is not always easy to be a foreigner in another country. For example, Americans speak the same language as the British and watch UK films and TV programmes. However, even Americans can be confused by British customs, behaviour and use of language.

You may spend a lot of time with a host family or in a student residence. If you stay with a host family you can learn a lot from them. In a student residence you can become lifelong friends with students from other countries. It's important to be open to the possibilities. Chapter 3 will give you some ideas on how to make your stay as pleasant and rewarding as possible.

Educational culture is different in every country. In British education, teachers expect students aged 16+ to be independent and self-motivated learners. Chapter 6 explains what this means in practice and how you can make the most of your time in the classroom or other learning environments.

Meeting people and making friends is not always easy, especially when you're from another country. Chapter 7 explains how this works in Britain, and suggests ways for you to enjoy your free time.

How much do you know about life in the UK?
Go to www.kestrelconnect.co.uk and view the Cultural Awareness pages.

Being a student abroad is not just about studying, but about personal development. Kestrel Connect is designed to help you make all sorts of discoveries about the UK and about yourself.

If you are a university undergraduate or graduate, this help also extends to professional development. Kestrel Connect makes connections for international students with selected employers offering work experience or employment (for those allowed to work in the UK).

If you'd like to connect with other international students to gain information and insight from their experiences, you can try Kestrel Connect Forum, the independent forum available on the Kestrel Connect website.

For more information and inspiration go to www.kestrelconnect.co.uk.

We hope you enjoy your stay in the UK and return home with many fond memories.

Anthony Cutler and Jill Doubleday

'America and Britain are two countries divided by the same language.'

George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright and co-founder of the London School of Economics



1 Taking Off

Before you leave, think!

Ask and answer these important questions before you leave for the UK.

- Is my passport valid?
- Do I have all the documents I need? (See Home Office Tier 4 guidance doc.*)
- Have I got my valid Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) document?
- Have I arranged somewhere to stay?
- Do I have enough money for my time in the UK?
- Can I prove to the UK authorities that I have enough money for my stay?
- Do I have all necessary addresses and telephone numbers for when I arrive in the UK?
- Do I have the telephone number of my country's Embassy in the UK?
- Do I know how to get to my institution and accommodation when I arrive?
- Do I have enough money to reach my destination after touching down?
- Have I told my host family/residence and the institution about my travel arrangements and arrival times?
- Do I have travel insurance?

*<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/applicationforms/pbs/Tier4migrantguidance.pdf>





2 Touching Down

If you are from a European Union country you should not have to answer many questions at the Immigration desk when you arrive. But if you are from another part of the world this is your first chance to practise your English in the UK.

When you answer Immigration Officers' questions it is important to be clear and to tell the truth. Make sure you have these documents to show to the officers:

- Your passport with the visas you need.
- Your Confirmation of Acceptance (CAS) from your school, college or university.
- Any documents from your bank to show that you have enough money for your stay in the UK.

Try to speak clearly and slowly. Be polite, and don't worry!

Here are some key questions that Immigration Officers usually ask. Notice that they could ask the same question in different ways. Practise your answers.

What is your name?
What's your name?
What's your first name?
What's your family name?
What is your last name?

What is your date of birth?
When were you born?

How long are you staying?
How long do you intend to stay?

What is the purpose of your visit?
Why are you here?

Have you got a Confirmation of Acceptance from the school/college?
Do you have a CAS from the school/college?

Have you paid the school fees?
Are your school fees paid?
Have you paid a deposit?

Have you got a return ticket?
Do you have a return ticket?

Where will you stay?
Where are you staying?
What's your address in the UK?
Is this your first visit to the UK?
Have you been to the UK before?

Will you be working in the UK?
Do you intend to work in the UK?
Are you planning to get a job here?

Have you got enough money to live on?
Do you have enough funds for your stay?

For more on immigration see the Important Information section.



2 Touching Down



Language tip

All languages have words and expressions that show politeness and respect. British people use 'please', 'thank you' and 'thanks'. It doesn't matter if you are speaking to someone younger or older than you. In the UK it is important to be polite and show respect to everyone you meet. The Immigration Officer may say 'thank you' when you give him or her a document. Say 'thank you' when the officer gives it back. English speakers usually add please, thank you or thanks when they accept or refuse an offer. Would you like a drink? Yes, please./No, thanks. Just saying 'yes' or 'no' sounds rude to native English speakers in Britain.

Study tip

It is a good idea to make a record of your stay in the UK. Buy a notebook or create a computer file where you can write down all the things that are strange or interesting in some way. Watch what people do in different situations. Is it similar or not to the way people behave in your country? Write down any common words or phrases that people use when they speak to each other. You can then ask your British friends, host family or teachers when and why people use these expressions in these situations.



You can also become a member of the Kestrel Connect online forum where international students discuss these matters or visit the Cultural Awareness pages at www.kestrelconnect.co.uk.



3 Feeling at Home

Your host family will do their best to make you feel at home, but some things will seem strange at first. The same is true if you are staying in a student hostel or residence. The important thing is to be open to the new culture.

UK families

Families in the UK may be a little different from families in your country. For example, women in the UK usually have a job, even when they are married. Many women go back to work after having a baby, and they often do most of the housework and cooking. However, many men do a lot of housework and caring for children these days. Some host families are older people whose children have left home.

Your host family

What will your host family try to do for you?

They will...

- do their best to make you feel at home and treat you as a member of the family.
- encourage you to speak English as much as possible.
- give you a clean and comfortable room where you can sleep, relax and study.
- make sure you have enough to eat.
- show concern for your health, safety and welfare during your stay.
- respect your cultural background.
- be sensitive to your needs.
- keep in touch with your school and help with any problems you have.

Notice that not all host families have computers with internet, broadband or wi-fi. If you need these, ask your school or college to place you with a family that has them before you arrive.

As a new member of the family you will take part in the normal routine of family life in the UK. You will probably meet other members of the family, as well as friends and neighbours. These will be good opportunities to practise your English.



A handshake

Greetings and names

British people often greet each other with a handshake when they meet for the first time. Friends and relatives often give each other a hug. Your host family may ask you what is usual in your culture, so that you feel comfortable.

Ask the family members what you should call them. They will usually be happy for you to use their first names.

Study tip

Watch how people in the UK greet each other. Listen to what they say. Can you tell how close or friendly they are by what they say and do? How does this compare with your culture?



Close friends and family give each other a hug



3 Feeling at Home

How can you fit in with your host family?

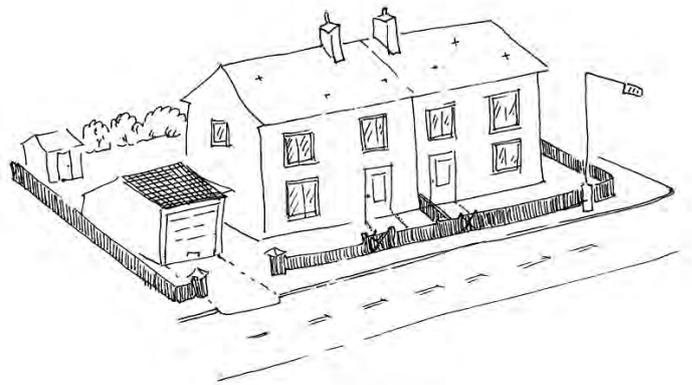
Every household has its rules about what members should or should not do. Therefore it is important to be sensitive to the rules of the house. In some households the fridge door is a place where you will find lists of school timetables, house rules, shopping lists and other important reminders.

The most important rule is to be considerate. Always consider other people's needs and feelings. Here are some general tips on how to fit in with your host family.

- Remember that you are sharing a home, not staying in a hotel.
- Ask if you should wear slippers, not shoes, in the house.
- Do not smoke anywhere in the house. If you are a smoker, ask where you may smoke. You might have to go into the garden or somewhere else outside.
- If you are going to be late home, or plan to stay away overnight, tell your host family.
- Your host will give you a key or keys to the house. Look after these keys and try not to lose them. If you are the only person at home, always shut the windows and lock the doors when you leave.
- If you want to invite a friend home, ask your hosts if it's OK with them.
- Your host family may invite friends for dinner or a party, and they may invite you too. However, sometimes they may not. Respect their wishes.
- If you are not sure about something, just ask. You can begin: *'Is it OK if I...'*. Remember that British people can be quite indirect, so when they say *'Well, not really'* they mean *'Absolutely not!'*

A house tour

Now let's take a tour round a 'typical' British home and look at how people interact in the rooms.



Semi-detached houses

Your room

Most houses in the UK have two floors and your room will usually be upstairs. You may have a room to yourself or a shared room with another student. Your hosts will make sure that you have a comfortable bed and space to store your clothes and belongings. You may also have a bedside light, a table or desk, a desk lamp and a chair. Your hosts will usually be happy to clean your room, but you can do this yourself if you prefer. In any case you should try to keep your room tidy.

Your hosts will give you clean bedclothes (duvet cover, sheets and pillowcases). They may change the bedclothes for you, or you may have to change them yourself. If you want to know what your room will be like, ask the school for details before you arrive.

Things to remember about your room

- You will not have a key to your room. You will be in a family home, not a hotel. Homes in Britain do not usually have locks on bedroom doors.
- You must keep your room clean and tidy. Don't forget to make your bed each morning and tidy the floor area.
- Different countries have different heating systems. Most homes in the UK have central heating, so you will have a radiator in your room. The heating will run on electricity, gas or heating oil. To save energy and heating costs, the heating will be off during the night when you are asleep. If you are cold, ask for an extra duvet or blankets.
- If you want to move any of the furniture, ask your hosts first.



3 Feeling at Home

- If you have brought electrical items with you, always ask before using them. Your hosts will check to make sure the voltage is correct. The voltage in the UK is almost always 230 volts.
- Also ask permission if you want to put posters or pictures on the wall.
- It's OK to listen to music in your room, but don't play it too loud.
- Be careful with furniture and other objects in the room. If anything breaks, tell the host family immediately. Offer to pay if you are responsible.
- If you want to bring friends home, ask your host first. If you go to your room, be considerate. Do not make a lot of noise as this may disturb other members of the family.



The sitting room

This is where many families relax, read the newspapers, watch television, and entertain their friends. Some people call it the 'living room' or 'lounge'. Family members may have their favourite armchairs.

Part of the sitting room may be a dining area. Some houses have a separate dining room. Some families eat most of their meals in the kitchen, but use the dining or sitting room on special occasions. Sometimes people eat while watching television if a favourite programme is on at the same time.



Things to remember about the sitting room

- Find out if family members have favourite chairs or armchairs.
- Use the chairs you are offered.
- Don't put your feet up on the furniture.
- Always ask if you want to turn on the television or switch to another channel.
- If you read books or newspapers, put them away tidily when you have finished.
- If you eat or have a drink in the sitting room always take the cups, plates and cutlery to the kitchen when you have finished.

The dining area

Mealtimes, especially evening meals, are opportunities to talk. Your hosts may be interested in what you have done, seen and learnt. Don't miss this opportunity. Ask them about anything new, unusual or strange that you have seen or heard. This is usually a good time to ask them questions and practise your English.

It is important to be on time for meals. If you are going to be late, phone and explain. Your hosts will keep a meal for you. Tell your hosts if you will be eating somewhere else that day.



3 Feeling at Home

Language tip

When you don't know people very well, two very useful words when making requests or offers are 'could' and 'would'.

Could you pass the butter, please?

Could I have some bread?

Would you like some orange juice?

Study tip

Notice how people make requests or offers in English. Write down some examples.

Can you tell how well these people know each other? Are some people more direct to each other? Why is this? What language would you use to make requests or offers to different English speakers you know?

Things to remember when eating in the dining area

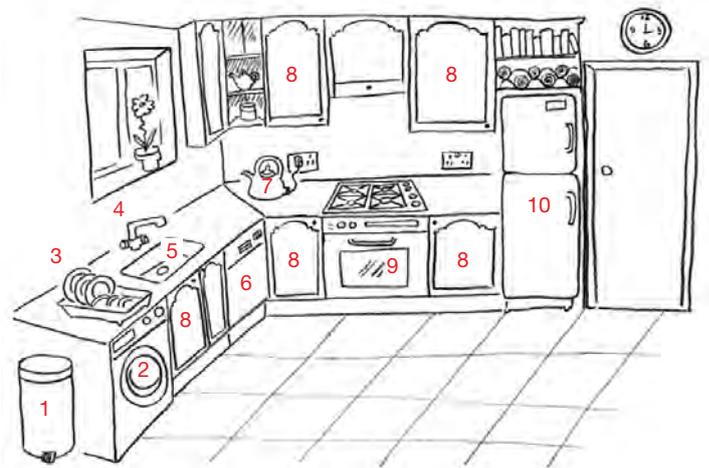
- Don't sit in someone else's favourite chair. Ask which chair you should sit in.
- It is polite to wait until everyone has their food before starting to eat. There is no special word or phrase that everyone says before eating. Your host may say something like 'Please start' or 'Do begin'.
- However, it is not rude to be the only person eating, so you do not have to stop when everyone else has finished.
- Be considerate. Pass things like salt and pepper, bread and butter, when people need them.
- Use a napkin if you have one. Spread it on your lap. You can use it to wipe your lips and fingers when necessary. British people don't usually use a hot towel to wipe their hands at the table.
- When you have finished, place your knife and fork side by side on your plate. Fold the napkin and place it beside the plate.
- You do not have to eat everything on your plate, but it is polite to eat most of it.
- Always offer to help clear the table. Take things into the kitchen area until the table is clear. Men and women, boys and girls help with this in most families.

Study tip

In what ways are table manners different in the UK? Observe and make notes. Your host family may not be typical, so observe other people in cafeterias and restaurants. Are there any manners you like or dislike? Write down what they are and why.

The kitchen

Some families eat most of their meals in the kitchen. They only eat in the dining or living room on special occasions. There will usually be a washing machine and there might be a dishwasher. In some homes there will be separate areas for cleaning materials and equipment for doing the laundry (washing clothes). These are often called utility rooms. There may be a separate larder or cupboard for storing some food.



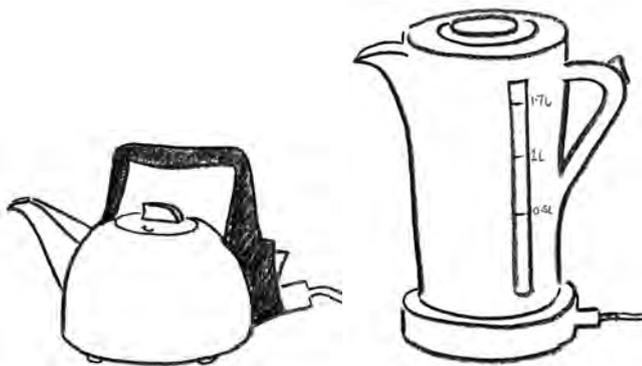
- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 rubbish bin | 5 sink | 8 cupboards |
| 2 washing machine | 6 dishwasher | 9 cooker (gas or electric) |
| 3 drying rack | 7 electric kettle | 10 fridge-freezer |
| 4 mixer tap | | |



3 Feeling at Home

Things to remember about the kitchen

- Ask your host what you may or may not do in the kitchen. Usually you will be allowed to make hot drinks and snacks by yourself, but don't take food from the cupboards or fridge without asking first.
- Keep the kitchen clean and tidy. If you have a drink or snack, put glasses, cups and plates away when you have finished.
- A very important item in most UK kitchens is the electric kettle. This boils water for tea and coffee. Teabags and instant coffee are very popular because they are quick and convenient. On the other hand, your hosts may prefer to make tea in a teapot. They may make coffee in a filter machine, a percolator or an espresso machine.



Two styles of electric kettle
– a very important part of a British kitchen

- Offer to wash up or dry the dishes after a meal. Both males and females do this in the UK.
- People don't always rinse the dishes with clean water after they have washed them with washing-up liquid.
- Some families have a dishwasher. Offer to help load or unload the machine when necessary.
- Put things back in cupboards and drawers in the places where you found them. If you drop or spill anything, clean it up.
- Always ask what to use for the cleaning.
- Don't forget to put things back in the fridge and cupboards when you have finished with them.
- If you break anything, apologise and offer to pay for it.

Recycling

You may be surprised at how little is recycled in the UK, but things are getting better! For example, the British now recycle some, but not all, plastic products. Your country probably recycles all kinds of plastic. The usual household items for recycling are glass (bottles and jars), tin cans, and paper (newspapers, magazines, etc). Check if your family has separate bins for rubbish to be recycled.

Food

Many visitors to the UK find the food boring and bland. Bland means without spice, taste or interest. The British often boil vegetables until they are soft. They roast, grill or fry meat, often without spices or herbs. That's why the British use salt, pepper and sauces such as tomato ketchup, mustard and gravy.

The good news is that British people eat food from other countries too, especially Italian, Chinese and Indian dishes. In large British cities you will find restaurants offering foods from many different countries. Chicken tikka masala is almost as popular as fish and chips these days. Although this is an Indian-style dish, it was invented by an Indian chef working in Glasgow.

Many people in the UK, both men and women, take an interest in food and cooking. Recipe books are bestsellers and cookery programmes are very popular. TV chefs are some of the most famous people in the UK. On the other hand, many people eat 'fast food' such as pizzas and hamburgers. On average people in the UK work more hours a week than most other Europeans. People don't have much time to shop for and cook fresh food. Supermarkets sell 'convenience food', pre-cooked dishes that can be heated up and served in 5 to 20 minutes. The British also buy a lot of frozen and tinned food. The microwave oven is a great time saver in many homes.



3 Feeling at Home

'In the home where I stayed the family didn't sit down together for meals. They just took whatever they wanted from the freezer, cooked it in the microwave and ate it in front of the television.'

Marta from Slovakia

'I had heard that British food was awful. But the family I stayed with loved good food. They bought fresh vegetables and meat, organic if possible, and spent time experimenting with new and interesting recipes. I took some recipes home with me and introduced them to my family.'

Ryota from Japan

In short, the food scene in the UK is mixed. Here is an idea of what you might expect during a normal week. Notice that meal times may differ from those in your country.

Breakfast

This is often a quick meal, usually between 7am and 8am just before people leave home for work or school. Some people eat it standing up if they are in a hurry.

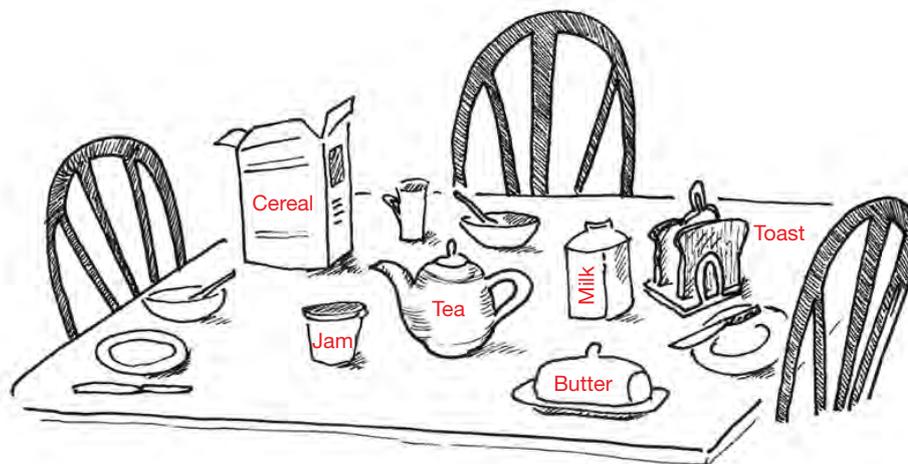
Light breakfasts are common, especially during the working week. They include:

- Cereal (such as cornflakes, muesli, etc) with milk
- Toast and jam or marmalade
- A glass of juice (orange, grapefruit, etc)
- Tea or coffee. Tea is usually black with milk added and sometimes sugar.

Notice that this is a cold food breakfast. If you are used to warm food for breakfast you may prefer the cooked breakfast.

Cooked breakfasts are less common, but some people eat:

- Eggs – boiled, scrambled, poached or fried, with toast.
- Notice how the British eat boiled eggs with a teaspoon.
- A traditional breakfast: a choice of fried sausages, bacon, eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms, baked beans and bread. This is a big meal and people usually eat it when they are on holiday or staying in hotels. Some people may eat it if they have physical jobs and need to eat a lot for breakfast.





3 Feeling at Home

Mid-morning break

Usually a short break for a snack and a hot drink at about 11 o'clock. Tea or coffee with biscuits, a chocolate bar, crisps or fruit. You will notice that many British people eat a lot of snacks between meals, such as fruit, biscuits, crisps ('potato chips' in American English), and chocolate bars. Eating snacks in the street is quite normal.

Lunch

Lunch is usually eaten at some time between 12 and 1.30pm. Lunch usually lasts 30 to 60 minutes. Some families call this 'dinner'. Most people eat a light lunch on working days. You may get a packed lunch from your hosts to take with you to school. This usually includes sandwiches, some fruit such as an apple or orange, and a biscuit or chocolate snack of some kind. Your host will ask what you prefer. You can then buy a hot or cold drink to go with it. For lunch most people in the UK choose from:

Sandwiches/ pizza/ a bowl of soup/ cold meat with salad/ a jacket potato/ baked beans on toast*/ a burger/ a heated 'ready' meal*

(*These lunches are usually prepared at home)

Many people add a packet of crisps, fruit or chocolate.

Mid-afternoon break

Another short break for a hot drink and snack. Remember, British people eat a lot of snacks.

Dinner

Usually early evening at any time between 6pm and 8pm. Some families call this meal 'tea' or 'supper'. What do people usually eat for dinner?

Traditional British food

Meat (beef, chicken, pork or lamb) or fish with potatoes, boiled vegetables and gravy. The meat is usually roasted, fried or grilled. Meat pies are also popular. For example, chicken pie, steak and kidney pie, and shepherd's pie (with minced meat and mashed potato). In general you may find that the British eat more meat than in your country. The potatoes may be boiled, mashed, roasted or baked. Chips are popular in the UK, especially in families with young children. People buy them in plastic bags and keep them in the freezer. They cook the chips from frozen in deep fat fryers, pans or ovens. Common vegetables: carrots, peas, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, green beans.

In the winter, stew is popular. This is like a thick soup, usually with meat and vegetables.

For dessert: apple pie, ice cream, cake or fruit. The British often eat dessert as the last part of a main meal.

International food

- Pasta (Spaghetti Bolognese, lasagne, ravioli)
- Pizza
- Curry with rice

Takeaways (collected from a shop or restaurant and eaten at home)

- Fish and chips
- Chinese food
- Indian food
- Pizza
- Hamburgers



3 Feeling at Home

Meals at weekends

Meals and meal times may be different at weekends if people are not working. Some families like to enjoy their free time without having to spend a lot of time cooking. Takeaways are popular time savers at weekends. Other families may enjoy cooking and having a big family meal. This used to happen on Sundays, but more and more families now have a meal with the whole family together on Friday evenings.

Outdoor barbecues in people's gardens are also popular during warm weather.



Special diets

More and more people are becoming vegetarian. This means they do not eat meat. Others are vegan. They do not eat anything connected to animals, such as meat, cheese, milk and eggs. Some people have allergies to wheat or dairy products and cannot eat them. Others do not eat certain foods for religious reasons. If you cannot or do not want to eat certain foods for any reason, tell your school about it before you come to the UK. The school can then choose the right family for you.

Study tips

Watch what, how and when British people eat. Do you notice differences between British families? How are eating habits different from your country? For example, what fruit do the British generally eat and how do they eat it? Make notes. Also write down recipes that you would like to take back to your own country. Ask your host for recipes or copy them from recipe books. Ask other students about their eating experiences in Britain. Is their experience similar or different from yours?

Things to remember about food and eating with your hosts:

- Expect the food to be different. Try to be 'open-minded'. Take the opportunity to try lots of new, different foods. You might like them.
- Be prepared to try everything once. You only have to taste it. If you don't like it, you won't have to eat it.
- Tell your school and your hosts before you arrive if you have a special diet, especially if you are a vegetarian or cannot eat certain foods. They will be happy to help you.
- Tell your hosts what you like and don't like. They will not be offended.
- If you have any difficulties with the amount or quality of the food you get with the host family, speak to the Welfare and Accommodation Officers at your school or college. They will be able to advise and help you.
- If you really miss food from your country, offer to make your host family a meal. Most supermarkets sell international food and spices.
- Cold water from the tap is perfectly safe in the UK. Most people only buy bottled water to carry outside the home. The bottled water they have in the fridge at home is usually carbonated, (aka sparkling).

Language tips

Here are some polite questions and answers you can use while eating with your host family.

Question: Would you like a second helping? (= would you like some more?)

Answer: Yes, please

OR

Answer: No, thank you. That was very nice but I'm full up now. (= I can't eat any more.)

OR

Answer: No, thank you. That was delicious but I want to save some room for dessert.

Question: You haven't eaten very much. Didn't you like it?

Answer: It was lovely/very tasty. But I had a big lunch/ I don't feel very hungry tonight.



3 Feeling at Home

The bathroom and toilet

Look at this drawing of a typical bathroom in the UK. How is it different from bathrooms in your country?



If you share a bathroom with the rest of the family it is important to know the house rules or customs. For example, in the mornings, people usually have a routine. That is, they use the bathroom at about the same time every morning before having breakfast and going off to work. You can ask your hosts what times are best for you to use the bathroom for a shower or bath. Again, the most important rules are to be considerate and to be sensitive to other people's needs.

How do people in the UK keep clean?

They wash using soap, a flannel or a sponge. They take a shower, especially if they don't have much time.

They take a hot bath. This is often used as a method of relaxation. Some people have a quick shower after their bath.

Using the bathroom

- Just as you do at home, think about others.
- Families have slightly different ways of doing things.
- Ask what time the bathroom is free, and how long you should spend in there.
- Tell someone when you plan to have a bath or shower, especially if the only toilet in the house is in the bathroom.
- Ask about hot water: in many UK homes people heat water as they need it, to save electricity, gas or oil. In some homes they use a timer to heat the water at fixed times.
- Many bathrooms have separate hot and cold taps. Be careful! The water can get very hot from one and very cold from the other.
- Try not to waste water. Some homes have a water meter, and families have to pay for the amount of water they use.
- Many UK bathrooms have carpets or mats on the floor. Some bathrooms have mats to protect the floor or carpet from water. Use these in the same way as your hosts.
- Try to keep the floor dry: don't fill the bath up to the top and remember to keep the shower curtain inside the bath tub.



- Only use your own towel in the bathroom, and ask your host family where you should put it to dry. Don't leave it on the floor – remember you are not in a hotel!
- Rinse out the bath and basin – leave them clean for the next person. Try to leave the floor dry.
- Ask your host family where to keep your toiletries. Don't leave medicines where young children can get them.
- Remember to lock the bathroom door!



3 Feeling at Home

The toilet (aka the loo)

There are some very important things to remember about using the toilet.

- Always flush the toilet after you have used it.
- Put all soiled paper in the toilet.
- Wrap sanitary items in a plastic or paper bag and put them in the waste bin which will be beside the toilet.
- If you use the last piece of toilet paper, put another toilet roll in the toilet roll holder, or tell your host that another is needed.
- Remember to follow any instructions your hosts give you about using the toilet.



We try to get along

The garden

Many UK homes have a garden (also known as a 'yard' in American English). There is often a small garden at the front of the house and a larger one at the back. Gardening is a common leisure time activity for many people. You will notice that very few people in the UK relax in their front gardens. The back garden is for outdoor eating and relaxation.

Pets

Pets are popular in the UK – nearly 50% of homes have one. If you don't like pets, tell your school in advance so that they can choose a family without pets for you. The most popular pets are fish, cats, dogs, rabbits, budgerigars, hamsters and guinea pigs.

'I was amazed. People keep pet animals in my country. But the British treat their pets like children!'

Alicia from Chile





4 Feeling at Home in a Student Residence



The key to feeling at home in a student residence is to choose the right accommodation from the beginning. There are many kinds of student residence, so it is important to investigate the options as thoroughly as possible. Fortunately, the internet now makes intensive investigation possible from a distance. We recommend that you get online and research.

Get the necessary information

As soon as you have a place to study at college or university, contact the Student Union International Officer and staff at the Accommodation office. Introduce yourself. There will be plenty of people whose job it is to help and advise you.

Key questions you should ask about any accommodation that is suggested to you:

Who runs the accommodation?

Is the accommodation run or managed by the college/university?

Is it run by a private company or landlord?

Note: Accommodation run by the college/university is usually less expensive and more in line with students' needs.

How close is it to the college/university/school?

Transport time and costs can make a big difference.

What transport links are there?

Even in big cities, some halls of residence may not be close to Tube or railway links. Bus links may be few and far between in the early morning or later in the evening. The closer to your place of study and the more transport links there are, the better.

What is included in the rent?

Will I have to pay separately for electricity, heating, cleaning, laundry?

Is insurance against theft, damage or loss included, or will I have to arrange this myself?

Are items of bedding included, or do I have to supply these myself?

Are kitchen utensils supplied, or do I have to buy these?

Is wi-fi access included or will I have to pay a charge for this?

Note: When researching halls of residence and accommodation generally, you will notice that some landlords offer you a rent that includes all or much of the above. Others require you to pay for all or many of these items separately.

For how long is the rental contract?

Many contracts are for 16 weeks, 40 or 51 weeks. How long will it be before you need to spend more time and money finding new accommodation? If you are offered a new contract, it could be for a higher rent, so the longer the term of the contract the better.

Do I have to pay the rent for the contract period in advance, or can I pay in instalments?

Note: A person under 18 years of age is not allowed to sign a contract in the UK.



4 Feeling at Home in a Student Residence

Will I have to pay a deposit?

How much? Will I get this back when I leave, provided there is no damage to be paid for? Many private landlords ask for a deposit that is equivalent to one week's rent.

Are the rooms en suite (with one's own bathroom) or are the bathrooms shared?

Are the rooms furnished?

What furniture is there?
Is there anything I need to supply myself?

Is there an area for socialising?

Most halls have lounges or sitting areas where students can relax and socialise. There will almost certainly be a TV room.

What other facilities are there?

Is there a washing machine, fridge, freezer, dishwasher?
Is there secure bicycle storage?

What recreational facilities are there?

Many halls of residence have table tennis tables, squash courts, tennis courts and gyms. If you are keen on a particular activity it is very likely that you can find accommodation near to the necessary facilities.

Are there shops nearby?

What sort of shops are they?
This is important if you are in a self-catering residence, as the quality and number of food shops can either save you time on shopping or add to it.

Frequently asked questions

Colleges and university websites will have 'frequently asked question' pages (FAQs) relating to halls of residence and other accommodation. Visit and study these pages. This is useful as it will give you an idea of the institution's accommodation policies. These are often quite strict.

For example: deposits must be paid on time; students must not arrive before their contract begins or leave after the end date on the contract; friends are not encouraged to share rooms or even be in the same hall of residence, as the policy is to oblige students to socialise widely and engage with other students; once

a room is booked it is probably impossible to change if the student does not like it; the possibility of having overnight guests in your room may be limited or non-existent, even if they are relatives.

As always, the key is to do your research in advance and find accommodation that suits you reasonably well.

Types of student residence

There are halls of residence run by colleges and universities and halls run by private companies.

Halls of residence run by educational institutions are usually designed for the needs of students. However, property developers in the UK have discovered that student accommodation is profitable. This means that the student accommodation located in a town or city can vary a great deal.

For example, halls built in the 1960s or 1970s had small but comfortable study bedrooms and were often 'catered' (providing breakfast and dinner with prices included in the accommodation fee.) There were often communal rooms for relaxation, TV rooms, a music room, a library, sports facilities and a garden where students could relax or study during warm weather. Such halls still exist and function in the same way. Other halls provide very basic accommodation, with hardly any facilities, and are 'uncatered', meaning that students have to buy and prepare their own food or eat in cafés and restaurants.

It is not certain that the more basic accommodation will be cheaper. That is why it pays to research the possibilities.

Both halls run by colleges and universities and those run by private companies offer different types of accommodation.

- Catered – with one or two meals provided, usually breakfast and/or dinner.
- Self-catering – with shared kitchens for doing one's own cooking.
- Single study-bedrooms - with en suite or shared bathrooms, or with both options available. En suite rooms will be more expensive.



4 Feeling at Home in a Student Residence

- Twin study-bedrooms – shared by two students. A less expensive option.
- Cluster flats – for example, with 4-8 en suite rooms designed around a shared kitchen and lounge area.
- Studio apartments – with separate study-bedrooms and a shared kitchen and sitting room. There are also smaller studio apartments for single students who want greater privacy.

Most student accommodation run by colleges, universities and large companies are obliged to make sure that a significant percentage has wheelchair access. A few halls accommodate men or women only. Some halls do not allow alcohol on the premises. Whatever your needs or preferences, it is likely that you can find the accommodation you prefer if you do the research and ask the right questions.

Some halls of residence house hundreds of students. They can be designed like inner-city tower blocks or be no more than two storeys high and situated in larger grounds. As you research, you may discover that your college or university has a wide variety of residences. Over the years some institutions have merged with others and acquired very different buildings. Some London colleges, for example, have large inner-city halls of residence and much smaller red-brick buildings in the suburbs. Some are busy and functional, others are quieter and, in some cases, quite charming. In other words, student accommodation in the UK caters for almost all tastes: you just have to know how and where to look.

What you do not want is to end up in accommodation that does not suit your needs, your temperament or your budget.



Making friends in a student residence

You may find certain aspects of living in a student residence surprising. Many people there will be living away from home for the first time. Some students will be hardworking, others will be keen on having a good time. There may be noisy parties, especially at weekends. Some students may even play pranks on each other. Do not be alarmed. For UK students this is all very much part of their 'rites of passage' and part of a work hard, play hard attitude.

British colleges and universities encourage all students to engage and mix as widely as possible. This is a great opportunity to meet lots of other young people from all parts of the UK and the world.

When you meet other students, be curious. Find out about them and their studies. Arrange to do things together. (See Kestrel Connect's ideas on must-try activities in the UK.) Don't be shy about asking questions or asking for help and advice. British people are often quite reserved, but they enjoy helping others in practical ways. If you make a good connection with UK students they will probably invite you to join their social activities and even meet their friends and family outside college or university. In short, being open, curious, tolerant, kind and helpful will open doors that can make your stay in the UK very enjoyable.

Be prepared for the amount of humour in everyday conversation. It is British people's defence against difficulties. They often use humour instead of getting upset or angry. (For more information see the Cultural Awareness pages on the Kestrel Connect website.)



4 Feeling at Home in a Student Residence



Making the most of the facilities

Make sure you know what facilities there are in the hall or nearby. There may be sports or recreational facilities that can be easily overlooked. It's a good policy to try everything once. If you are unfamiliar with certain games or activities, UK students will be happy to show or instruct you. The British love someone who tries or 'has a go'. Clearly, this does not include doing anything risky or dangerous. Be adventurous, but not foolish.

Dealing with difficulties

There may be situations where you need to defend your interests. The important thing is to stay calm and be objective, factual and measured in your response. Here are a few scenarios:

You have been overcharged or treated unfairly

Remain calm. Collect any evidence you have. Treat the situation as a mistake, not a conspiracy. If the person responsible dismisses your claim, you can always approach the staff in your Student Union or in the Welfare and Accommodation Office. They are there to help and support you. They can also help you negotiate and reach a solution.

Other students are making too much noise

This is a common problem in halls of residence. Again, remain calm. Knock on the student's door and ask for the music to be turned down or for people there to make less noise. Explain that you have an assignment and are trying to work. Saying it with a smile often helps.

If the noise continues, contact the person responsible for the administration of the building. It is their job to deal with the problem, and you should not need to get involved in disputes of this kind. Your time is too valuable.



4 Feeling at Home in a Student Residence

Keeping things tidy

If you share a kitchen or lounge, make sure you wash up your dirty dishes and leave a clean and tidy area for others. The same applies to shared bathrooms, shower rooms and laundry areas.

If other students fail to tidy up, you can ask them calmly to do so, as it is unfair that others do more cleaning than necessary. Phrasing questions with 'could' always sounds more polite and less confrontational.

'Could you wash up your dishes next time you use the kitchen?'

'Could you put your empty pizza boxes in the rubbish bin next time?'

Having friends to stay

Most halls of residence have policies on visitors staying overnight. Make sure you follow the rules. These will vary, but here's a typical example.

"You are allowed one overnight guest (who must be over 18) for a maximum of two consecutive nights in any one week, and for a maximum of six visits per term. Overnight guests must sign the hall register. All other visitors must leave the hall or grounds before midnight.

For health and safety reasons you will be allowed no more than two student or non-student guests at any one time. You are responsible for the behaviour of your guests or visitors, and you will have to pay for any damage or loss they cause. Guests or visitors are not permitted to enter or use your room or flat when you are not present."

If anyone suggests that you have not been following the rules, stay calm and state the facts.

Getting ready for your next year

Some colleges and universities allow students to spend only one year – often their first year - in a hall of residence. It therefore makes sense to carefully research accommodation possibilities for subsequent years. Do not leave this too late. Get researching as early as you can. Ask other students and accommodation officers about the possibilities. Accommodation is one of the biggest headaches for UK students. Demand is high and supply limited. For your own convenience and peace of mind, it pays to get your arrangements in place as early as possible.



5 Sharing Accommodation



Sharing accommodation successfully means choosing the right people to share with you. Only you can decide, but here are a few considerations:

- You may like the person(s), but are they as hardworking as you? Could their lifestyles and habits interfere with your working schedules?
- Are they reliable when it comes to paying their share of the bills?
- Will they stay for the period of the contract? Will you have to look for someone else at short notice?
- Will they share the housework and other household duties?

It is impossible to foresee how others will behave, but it's always helpful to make informed guesses from existing evidence.

Types of accommodation

Broadly speaking there are three categories of rented accommodation.

- Properties managed by colleges and universities.
- Rooms and flats run by individuals.
- Properties rented out by private estate agents and other property companies.

The range of properties will usually be:

- Houses – with 2-7 or more bedrooms.
- Flats – with 2 or more bedrooms.
- Studio apartments – usually one-bedroom, self-contained flats.
- Bedsits – single rooms with very basic cooking facilities in a large building with shared bathroom(s).
- Rooms in others' homes – (aka to lodge, be a lodger) usually a single room in someone's home, sometimes called 'homestay'.

Pros and cons (advantages and disadvantages)

Houses and flats

These can provide a dynamic environment with a number of students sharing. Downsides can include problems with noise, some sharers not keeping up with the bills or not doing housework. If the property is owned and run by an individual, not a company, repairs may take time. Neighbours may not be entirely happy having students in the area.



5 Sharing Accommodation

Studio apartments

These can provide more privacy, better furniture and kitchen equipment. Security may also be better. However, they can also be more expensive.

Bedsits

They are usually less expensive, but the others in the building may not be students. Maintenance and security may not be the best. Cooking facilities are usually limited to a small cooker and a cupboard.

Rooms in others' homes

Suitability for a student depends entirely on the home and homeowner. The latter is usually letting a room for financial reasons. They may have a very limited interest in students' lives or concerns. Lodgers are expected to respect house rules, keep to their rooms as much as possible and share the facilities with a minimum of inconvenience to the owners. Students may find these conditions restrictive. You may not even be offered a contract. The arrangement could be based on a verbal agreement and a handshake.

On the other hand, some homeowners enjoy having company and have considerable experience in helping students through an important time in their lives. They may also be very friendly, sympathetic and willing to help in practical ways. Some homeowners remain good friends with their student lodgers.

It is up to each student to decide what he or she wants from a 'homestay' situation, and to be able to assess what the homeowner wants. If you are both 'on the same page', it could work out very well.

Note: Many British people appear very reserved. However, if you approach them (including private landlords) with a problem or if you need advice, they are often very sympathetic and helpful.

If you are going to share accommodation with British students or with a UK landlord in a private home, read section 3 - Feeling At Home. This will give you some idea of British lifestyles and habits in the home.

Sharing with friends and acquaintances

As you already know, living with a friend is a big test of friendship. It is always better to be clear about hopes and expectations from the beginning. If necessary, draw up a few basic rules. You want to avoid the following scenarios:

- Some of you are noisier than others.
 - One or more doesn't pay bills on time.
 - The behaviour of one or more upsets the neighbours.
 - One or more tenants move out, leaving others with empty rooms to pay for or fill at short notice.
- A difficult accommodation situation will interfere with your studies.

Sharing the space

Many UK students save money by renting flats that have fairly basic facilities, though standards and expectations have risen in recent years. When looking at properties to rent, you will be balancing comfort and convenience against cost.



Large houses and flats do not usually have bedrooms the same size. This means that one of you will end up with the smallest room, even though you are paying the same share of the rent as someone else with a larger room. British students accept this as a 'fact of life'. The usual way of dealing with it is to draw lots. You put room numbers in a hat or bag, take turns to put your hand in and draw out a number.



5 Sharing Accommodation

You can discuss the rules for dividing up the rooms. Sometimes students draw lots every term. Or they decide that those with the bigger rooms will swap with those who start off with the smaller ones. The important thing is to be aware of these possibilities in advance and agree on how you are going to proceed.

Security and safety

Students in the UK are the victims of burglary and theft more often than the population in general. Areas where students live have fast-changing populations, and it is hard to know if someone is a student with the right to enter a building or not. Therefore, it is important to work out how best to secure your house, flat or room.

- Make sure all locks on doors and windows work effectively.
- Ask your landlord to change any locks that do not function properly.
- If you are the last person to leave the property at any time, make sure all doors and windows are locked and set the alarm if you have one. Many UK residents lock doors even when they are at home.
- Do not give anyone else a spare key or tell them the code for the alarm.
- Ask your landlord to instal deterrent lights on the outside of the building, if they are not there already.
- You can place notices on outside doors and windows. 'Hi! Smile for the hidden camera!'. You can do this even though there is no camera.
- If you can afford it, put up real motion activated cameras. If you can't afford that, put up fake ones with little red blinking lights (remember to change the batteries).
- When you first move in, make a big show of checking all outside security devices, alarms and locks.

Your landlord has responsibility for making sure all heaters, boilers, water and electrical appliances are working properly. You should:

- Make sure there are smoke detectors in all parts of the building.
- Check on emergency exits in case of accident or fire.
- Know how you will escape the building in case of fire or any other emergency.
- Make sure you have a first aid kit in the bathroom or kitchen.

Last, but not least, make sure you have home contents insurance in case of theft or damage.



Contracts

It may be easier to rent accommodation through landlords recommended by your college or university. First, there may be a relationship of some years which means that your landlord understands students' needs. Secondly, staff at your institution will be able to help with any legal questions. In addition, you may have special requirements, such as wheelchair access or the need to accommodate relatives and/or children. Institutions have more experience in meeting students' needs.

Some colleges and universities have collaborated with landlords to draw up standard contracts that are easy to understand and follow.

When a private landlord (or anyone else) presents you with a contract, never sign it straight away. You should be able to consider it for 24 hours. If you have any questions, visit your Students' Union and ask for expert advice. You may be advised to have certain clauses removed and others included.

If you are sharing accommodation, always make sure that all the sharers are equally responsible, in law, for rent and other costs. Never put yourself in the position of being the only person legally responsible.



5 Sharing Accommodation

To help you enforce terms of contracts with landlords here are some things you can do to protect your interests:

- Get a receipt from your landlord for the deposit you have paid. You should always be able to get this back, provided you have paid the rent on time and not done any damage to the property. If a landlord tries to withhold the deposit when you leave, contact your Students' Union for legal assistance.
- Take digital images of the property when you move in. Save the images in more than one place and make sure they are correctly dated. Make sure you take images of any part of the property that is already damaged. If your landlord later claims that you did damage you have the evidence to the contrary.
- Tell your landlord in writing of any damage that you notice as, or just after, you move in. Make sure you get a written agreement from your landlord that this damage was done before you moved in. As a general principle, always carry out business with your landlord in writing (email is fine) and make sure you save it. Print out and save emails for added peace of mind.
- Take images of all electricity and gas meter readings, if possible once a month. Again, make sure the dates associated with the images are correct. Energy companies often ask customers for meter readings and your photos will be evidence that your readings are accurate.
- Always be clear with your landlord which parts of a property you are allowed to occupy and use. This relates to any cellars, attics, garages, sheds, garden areas etc. This should be part of a contract, but make sure you have this in writing.
- Where possible, pay your landlord by credit card or bank transfer, not cash. This will leave a record of the transaction and will give you more rights in case of a dispute. Always get and keep receipts for transactions.

Your rights and responsibilities

A landlord must, by law, maintain the structure of a building and make sure that boilers, heaters, water pipes and other utilities work properly and safely.

As a tenant you should make sure that you treat the property with respect. Report any faults as soon as possible so that the landlord can arrange repairs. If you break anything, let the landlord know. You will probably have to pay, if it was your fault, but most landlords will be relieved to know that they have responsible tenants.

It is also your responsibility to respect the neighbours and maintain good relations with them. Most UK residents appreciate their privacy, which accounts for the expression 'An Englishman's home is his castle'. You will have a good time in the UK if you get on well with your neighbours. A smile and a 'hello' always helps. If you establish good relations, your neighbours may keep an eye on your interests: for example, helping you maintain security, offering to take in large parcels delivered when you are out, and so on.

You should maintain good relations with both neighbours and the local council (local government departments), by following rules on keeping front gardens, paths and pavements tidy, putting out rubbish for collection at the right times, and recycling waste in the way recommended by the local council. If you own a bicycle or motorbike, make sure you park it so that pedestrians can pass by on the pavement or path. If you have a car, follow the local rules about parking.

You are not alone

If you ever have a problem while renting in the UK, remember that you do not have to fight for your rights alone. There are plenty of people who can help. Most important of these are your Student's Union and Citizens Advice, who can offer free, independent and confidential advice. You can contact them by telephone, online or in person by visiting a local office.

Have fun

While we have tried to highlight some of the potential problems with renting and sharing accommodation, it is important to remember that for most students it is problem-free and great fun. Choose your sharers wisely, seek the advice of your Student's Union on legal matters, follow the terms of your contract and you will have a hassle-free experience.



6 Learning in the UK



Every country has its own educational culture. Studying in Britain is not just a question of what you will study but also how you will study it.

British teachers expect learners to become responsible, independent, autonomous and self motivated. What does this mean in practice?

- Most teachers in language schools in Britain are informal. You can call them by their first names.
- At college and university it is advisable to call staff by their titles and surnames unless they tell you otherwise.
For example, Mrs Campbell, Dr Rush, Professor Naysmith.
- Learners should follow the course and complete their homework or assignments on time. If you are ill or have other good reasons for not finishing work on time, your teachers will be understanding and give you as much help as they can. However, teachers cannot help if students don't do any work.
- Teachers appreciate students who know what their goals are. This could be to learn your subject for a special purpose, to pass an exam, to qualify for a job, or to study the subject as deeply as possible. If you are clear about your goals, your teachers can advise you on how to achieve them.

- British teachers will not tell you the answers to questions. They will not give you some material and tell you to memorise the contents.
- In Britain you can find information to help with your studies in many places - in libraries, bookshops, online, and through television and radio programmes. Teachers will tell you where you can find information and how you can use it. They will give you advice on how you can explore your subject and make discoveries for yourself. However, you must be willing to go to teachers and ask for their help and advice. If you do, teachers will be happy to help, but they expect you to do the work.
- Questions are the key to education. If you ask your teachers good, relevant questions you will show that you are interested in the subject. This also makes the classroom a more interesting place for learning. British teachers like being asked questions. Your fellow students are glad if you ask questions because it helps them learn too.
- Teachers will ask you to speak during classes or seminars. This is part of the learning process, especially in language classes but also in other subjects. Speaking will help you form opinions and share them with others. When you speak, your teachers are not judging or testing you. They are giving you a learning opportunity. The more you speak, the more you will improve, especially if you are a language learner.
- Do not be surprised if your teachers make jokes. Many teachers like to create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. Studies show that many people learn better when they are not worried. It is also natural in Britain to make or share jokes during both work and leisure.



'Have you heard the joke about the visitor to Britain who had trouble pronouncing words like cough, enough, and though? He gave up when he saw a newspaper headline: Exams pronounced tough.'



6 Learning in the UK

- British schools and college timetables have ‘free’ study periods. During this time you can study alone and make use of resources such as libraries and computers. Teachers expect you to make the best use of your time without being told what to do. Of course, you can always ask teachers for advice on how to use resources during these free study periods.
- Every group of students is different. Every class you are in will offer you learning opportunities. Your teacher will sometimes encourage members of the class to work together, in pairs, groups or the whole class. This might include work outside the classroom. These will be good learning opportunities. Think of your classmates as ‘learning resources’. They can help you learn. You may also discover interests you have in common and become friends.

Study tip

Watch how British teachers teach. Make notes. Ask yourself the questions below. The answers may change and develop during your stay.

- Do British teachers create a relaxed and informal atmosphere in class?
- If so, how do they do this?
- Does this make learning easier or more difficult?
- Is this different from your educational culture?
- Which styles of teaching and learning suit you best?
- Has your time in Britain helped you become a better learner?

Learning and personal development in Higher Education

Progressively over the last 200 years, British universities have been liberated from religious, gender and social class discrimination. In 1871, Catholics, Jews and non-conformist Christians were allowed entry to universities as students and teachers. London University was the first to admit women to degrees in 1878 and women eventually gained access to all higher education on the same conditions as men. Able students from poor backgrounds were given financial assistance to attend university from 1945 onwards. Increasingly, the criteria for a place at university related more to ability than privilege, though these questions are still hotly debated today.

As the criteria for admission changed so did ideas on what a university education was for. This subject will always lead to long discussions, but it is important to understand what qualities tutors in the UK look for in their students. Brilliance and talent will always help, but beyond that tutors look for:

- A capacity for critical thinking, creativity, concentration and hard work.
- A willingness to follow the course as shaped by tutors, while also showing an ability to work independently.
- An openness to new ideas and a willingness to explore them through discussion and further study.
- A preparedness to challenge one’s own assumptions and to accept that evidence is open to different interpretations.
- An attitude of tolerance towards others and a measured response to opinions that differ from one’s own.





6 Learning in the UK

UK higher education has experienced notable expansion in recent years. Many former technical colleges and polytechnics are now called universities and award degrees. The situation has become complex, but UK universities may conveniently be categorised as follows:

- World class universities based on long-standing, established reputations for research and teaching.
- Newer universities that specialise in teaching, and aspire to building up an increasing reputation for research.
- Higher education institutions that specialise in vocational education.

When applying to colleges and universities in the UK, be realistic about how a degree from these institutions can serve your interests, needs and career prospects.

- How much one-to-one or small group supervision can you expect?
- Are the lecturers noted in their fields? Check their lists of book and research publications.
- Where does an institution stand in recognised world rankings of universities?

You can check their positions on these sites:

www.topuniversities.com

www.shanghairanking.com

Competition at leading universities is intense and many candidates are disappointed not to win places at their preferred institutions. Such disappointment is common in academia. Even well known professors do not get the positions they seek.

Nonetheless, it is possible for graduates from little known colleges or universities to rise to the top of their professions. Many departments within less known universities have excellent reputations for research and teaching. Many of their staff may go on to top universities later in their careers. Success depends on an individual's passion for a subject and the desire to make as much as possible of their opportunities. All institutions will have some truly inspiring and dedicated teachers. All departments will have some interesting students who are immersed in their subject and capable of inspiring others. It is up to each individual student to make these connections and benefit from the opportunities.

There is more information on Kestrel Connect's website, but here are a few general ideas on how to benefit from studying in the UK.

- Make sure you are aware of all the facilities at your college or university.
- Research opportunities further afield. For example, many cities have more than one university. There will be other lectures taking place in your subject nearby. There will be other libraries and resource centres.
- Meet students from other colleges and universities, especially those studying your subject.
- Discover other libraries, museums, galleries, and research institutes of relevance to your subject in your area. For example, if you are a scientist or engineer, check out the science or engineering companies in your area. Ask to go and visit. Your tutors may know of opportunities and may even help you make the connections.
- Don't hesitate to make connections by phone, email or letter. Introduce yourself and communicate your interest in your subject. Clearly you shouldn't make a nuisance of yourself, but many people in the UK appreciate those who take an initiative.
- Log on to the Kestrel Connect website to check for interesting lectures, events and activities in your area.



6 Learning in the UK



Making Friends

This topic may seem misplaced in a chapter on 'learning', but there is much to be gained in terms of personal development and cultural awareness from widening your circle of acquaintances and friends.

One of the greatest problems for international students in the UK is that they tend to socialise only with students from their own countries. This is also true of British students. No one is quite sure why this happens, but the reasons probably include:

- Functioning all day in a foreign language is hard work, especially at an academic level. Therefore, it is easier and more relaxing to socialise in one's mother tongue. Some British students and even teachers may not understand this, since relatively few have ever had to learn a foreign language that well.
- Certain aspects of the local culture can be difficult to deal with. For example, some UK students need to get drunk to have a good time. However, in losing their inhibitions they can also become objectionable. When sober once more they may revert to being socially awkward and reserved.
- Students from home can more easily understand what one is experiencing and are therefore more capable of offering sympathy and support.
- If one has a problem with a British person, it's easy to assume that all British people are like that.
- Studying takes so much time and energy. There simply isn't time to deal with all the cultural differences as well.
- It's not as easy as putting students from different countries and backgrounds together and asking them to integrate. It's more complicated than that.

All that is true, but here are a few reasons why it pays to make friends with students of other nationalities.

- One major reason for studying abroad is to develop skills that are valuable to (or even as) future employers. It can help to be 'culturally agile'.
- Connections made in the UK with people from all over the world can lead to future opportunities.
- Socialising widely can contribute to educational opportunities. Your English will improve, and other students can be very helpful in navigating the requirements of your course. If you are a first year, you can gain insights and ideas from second and third-year students. You can also make connections with postgraduates.
- It is true that certain 'rites of passage' for UK students, such as drinking alcohol, will seem alien to many international students. But as Winston Churchill once said, 'In the morning, I shall be sober.' Although some behaviour can appear juvenile, it is often a question of 'letting off steam'. Most UK students are fundamentally as serious, sensitive and curious as the world population in general.
- If you feel lonely at first and find it difficult to make meaningful connections with others, remember that many UK students will be feeling the same way. Many of them are not expert at being sociable. Even if you do not succeed in making firm friends every time you initiate a conversation, you will make acquaintances. Most friendships grow from small beginnings.
- The British famously join clubs where they conduct their social lives within the confines of their club's rules. Every college or university will have many clubs, also known as 'societies'. Find out which club or society interests you, and join. This is an excellent way to make contact with British students. Remember that in the UK societies are usually vehicles for social activity hiding behind the club's apparent purpose. Very few students who join the Tiddlywinks Society are very interested in playing tiddlywinks.
- You could even join a club outside the university in the local community. That way you will definitely make friends.



6 Learning in the UK

How to break the ice

- Be patient.
- Try not to be easily offended.
- Employ your sense of humour. The British try not to take things too seriously: it's how they cope with difficulty.
- If you don't want to drink, don't. If you need to, say you're not used to it, or even that it makes you ill. At the same time you can comment with amazement on your UK friends' ability to drink copious amounts. They will take that as a compliment. Mention it next day as well. They will be pleased and proud. You will notice how stories about how much they drank the night before help them bond. By showing amazement and admiration, you will be helping with their self-esteem and taking part in their bonding rituals.
- Many British people value their privacy and respect the privacy of others. This can make them seem difficult to approach. A good way to break the ice is to ask UK students for information or some other minor assistance. Most British people like to be useful in practical ways. You will also discover which UK students are prepared to step out of their cultural comfort zones.
- Don't take British people's reserve at face value. Ask questions. There will always be some topic of conversation that will bring them out of their shells. They will like you for that (provided it's not too personal, of course).
- Notice how British people like to moan (complain). Sympathise with them when they do this. You could reciprocate by having a moan (complaining about something) yourself. Provided you are not complaining about Britain and the British, other UK students will probably appreciate your solidarity in moaning.
- Adopting a friendly, light-hearted, helpful, non-judgemental attitude in social relations in the UK will inevitably lead to friendships. It could happen straight away, or it may take a little longer. Whatever happens, don't give up.

The important thing is to have made social connections in the UK that contribute to your personal and professional development.



7 Social Life and Society



Living with a family in Britain

The family you stay with may be different from your own family in several ways. In families with two parents and one or more children, the cost and pace of life usually mean that both parents have to work. They take young children to nursery schools, or pay carers to look after them during the working day. Related families do not always live near each other as they did in the past. Even when families live close by, some people don't spend much time with their relatives. They rely on the friends they have made at work or through their social activities and other interests.

'Friends are the family you choose for yourself.'

A new saying in Britain

The extended family, with three generations sharing the same home, is now rare in Britain. Social services, family members and private carers help elderly and disabled people to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. When this is not possible, the elderly move to care homes, also

known as 'old people's homes'. Many older people say they prefer this because they can be independent and make friends among the other residents. On the other hand, elderly people can also be very lonely, and the care they receive is not always the best.

'In my country families are close-knit. They spend time with each other every day. It's not like that in Britain.'

Dolnay from Turkey

There are now many single-parent families in Britain. Children are cared for by one parent, usually the mother, for most of the week, but have time with their other parent on some weekends or holidays. Sometimes the children have almost no contact with the other parent. Many visitors to Britain think that British parents treat their offspring more like friends than children. It is true that relations between parents and children are generally more relaxed and less strict than they were in the past.



7 Social Life and Society

Young people try to leave home to live in rented accommodation or their own houses and flats when they finish their education. High property prices have made this difficult, so many children return to live with their parents until they can afford to leave home.

Parents often help children with money, but most young people try to become independent as quickly as possible. If they go to college or university, they may wait before getting married or starting a family. Those who leave school and get a job immediately may decide to start a family very quickly. That is why you will see some very young mothers in Britain.

If you are a language student in 'homestay' or a higher education student renting as a lodger, you may stay with a retired couple, or you may be with a widow or widower who is living alone. Being a host to visiting students may be a way for them to earn some extra money and have some company.

However, it is quite possible to find yourself in a family with two parents, two young children, and plenty of relatives visiting regularly. Grandparents may look after children. You may meet lots of aunts, uncles and cousins, as well as family friends. In short, family circumstances vary a lot in the UK.

Here are some points to remember when spending time with British families.

- Other nationalities often think the British are reserved. This is a first impression. The British may not embrace and kiss you on both cheeks when you first meet but, in time, they can show themselves to be very warm and considerate.
- At first the British use 'small talk' when they don't know somebody well. This may include talking about the weather. But 'small talk' is often just a way of finding out what you have in common. It can quickly become 'big' or 'interesting' talk. Think of 'small talk' as 'starting a fire'. You have to start with small, dry sticks before you can add heavy logs.
- In some countries it is not the custom to say that you feel ill or upset. This is not so in the UK. If you are feeling unwell or upset, it is OK to say what the problem is. You will find most British people concerned and ready to help if they can.
- As a general rule British women are good at talking about feelings. British men, on the other hand, like to think of themselves as problem solvers, finding practical solutions to practical problems.
- Men and women are treated equally. Men do some

housework, and women often do heavy work like gardening and small building jobs around the house. Boys and girls do some household tasks, such as clearing the table or helping to prepare meals.

- Most British people like a good discussion or debate. You can express your opinions and the other person will respect them, even if they disagree with you. However, some opinions will be difficult for most British people to accept. These include racism, sexism or not respecting women, and being unkind about people who have a disability.
- The British have a reputation for a good sense of humour. British film and TV comedies are famous all over the world. The British like 'word play', stand up comedy and satire. It is often said that the British don't mind laughing at themselves. This is part of the social rule that people in the UK do not take themselves too seriously.
- Remember that not all the British are English. The United Kingdom (of Britain and Northern Ireland) is made up of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. People in the UK can have more than one national identity. For example, people can think of themselves as British and English, or British and Scottish. Some people are very proud of being Scottish, Welsh, Irish or English. For example, many people in Wales speak Welsh, not English, as their first language. Each of the countries has its own international sports teams, and the most hotly contested matches are between British sides. Therefore, do not think that all people in Britain are English. Some people can get quite annoyed if you do.

Of course, the points above are general. They do not apply to everybody. You can test whether you think they are generally true or not during your time in Britain. Remember that English teachers at your school will be happy to listen to your experiences of life in the UK. They will also try to explain examples of behaviour you find interesting or confusing.



7 Social Life and Society

Study tip

Observe and listen to British people. Make notes in your notebook. Ask yourself these questions.

- How emotionally 'warm' or 'cold' are British people?
- Is British 'small talk' a complete waste of time?
- How equal are British men and women in the home?
- Are British women better at offering emotional support than men?
- Do the British treat their offspring more like friends than children?
- Do the British respect free speech and others' opinions even if they don't agree with them?
- Do you think the British generally have a good sense of humour? What makes British people laugh?
- How important are national identities within Britain? Do people consider themselves English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish first, and British second? How do they show their national identity?

Making friends, again

Many people think that the British are, in general, reserved and unfriendly. For example, you may notice that strangers usually do not speak to each other on trains or buses. However, it is possible to make friends with British people and below are some points to help you.

- You may find friends in your host family, especially if members of the family are close to your own age. They may suggest some free-time activities, such as sports or going to pubs and clubs. Remember, try anything once. Even if you don't enjoy it, you will learn something about life in the UK. If you do enjoy it, you can do it again and perhaps make more friends.
- You may find that you do not enjoy the free-time activities of young people in the UK. It is true that many young British students spend a lot of time at college or university 'having a good time'. This can involve a lot of drinking and going to clubs. Many students do little work in their first year, but you may prefer to be hard-working from the very first day. In that case it is important for you to choose your friends and free-time activities with care.

'When I first went to college in Britain, I was shocked at how many students were late for classes because they had been in the pub the night before. In my country students work much harder.'

Xiao Xiao from China

'In my country it is shameful to be drunk in public. But in Britain young people go out with the purpose of getting drunk. It's like a sport. To be honest, I hate this attitude, and that's why I have hardly any British friends of my own age.'

Panayiotis from Greece

- A good way to meet people is to join clubs. If you are at college or university this is easy because there are many clubs to choose from. If you are at a language school, you can ask your Social Activities Organiser or Welfare Officer for information about local clubs.
- Which club should you choose? If you play a sport, join a sports club. If you don't like sport, there are clubs for people who like art, music, local history and many other things. Don't worry if the people are not your age – they will still be friendly!
- Many British people take evening classes once a week in all sorts of subjects. Music, dance, arts, crafts, foreign languages, information technology, yoga, photography, and many more. Find out what courses are available by asking at your local library or searching on the Internet. Some courses are cheap; it depends which one you choose. Many take these classes to meet new people, as well as to learn. Courses take place at colleges, schools, community centres and other places. If you enrol on one at a college, an extra bonus is that you may be able to join the National Union of Students. With an NUS card you can get cheaper cinema tickets, clothes and haircuts.
- Your school may be able to arrange some volunteer work for you. This could be something simple such as visiting elderly people in a nursing home, just to chat to them. You could join or work for a charity, or go along to your local church.



7 Social Life and Society

- Many Britons enjoy watching sports. The main spectator sports are football and rugby in the winter months and cricket in the summer. If you enjoy watching sports you can join others in front of a television at home or in a pub which shows 'live' sports on big screens. Although football is the biggest spectator sport in Britain, rugby and cricket have many fans right across the English-speaking world.



- Pub culture is very important to British life and there are many pubs to choose from. In town and city centres, you will find pubs that show 'live' sport on TV and play music CDs or have a jukebox. Many also have 'live' music, karaoke or quizzes. Some also have games you can play, such as darts and pool (similar to billiards). You can also find pubs that serve excellent food and are perhaps more about eating than drinking. Local pubs (pubs outside city and town centres) are often good places to make friends, as the same people go there night after night. Bigger towns and most cities also have gay-friendly pubs. Many pubs have areas for quietly eating and drinking with

friends, and other areas for watching sports, playing pub games and listening to music. Therefore you should be able to find a pub, or part of one, that you like!

Notice that all pubs and clubs are non-smoking. If you want to smoke you'll have to go outside.

Leisure activities

As in any country, there are many different leisure activities to choose from. Some of the most popular are:

- Watching TV
- Going to the pub
- Watching football and other sports
- Playing sports
- Shopping
- DIY and Gardening
- Evening classes
- Restaurants, the cinema and the theatre

Watching TV

In the UK there are numerous digital channels that everyone can receive, but many people also have cable or satellite TV. Most channels are commercial. That is, they receive money for showing advertisements or commercials during breaks in the programmes. The BBC channels, on the other hand, do not show commercials. The BBC receives money from the government to make TV and radio programmes. That is why everyone has to pay a TV licence fee each year. This pays for 8 interactive TV channels, 10 radio networks, over 50 local TV and radio services and the website www.bbc.co.uk. If you buy a TV in Britain you will have to buy a TV licence. See page 39 for further information.

TV programmes can give you an idea of what is popular in the UK. For example there are shows about DIY and home improvement, as well as sports, travel, cooking, gardening and celebrity. TV soaps may be baffling at first but, if you have time, they can give you an insight into the British mentality. Where US soaps are generally about being aspirational, British soaps are often about people living difficult lives: or, as the Americans would say, 'losers'.



7 Social Life and Society

Going to the pub

In the 'Making friends, again' section you read a little about pubs in Britain. They may be different to bars in your country. In particular you will notice:

- Both men and women drink in pubs.
- Most pubs do not have waiters to bring drinks to you. You must go to the bar to order your drinks and you pay for them as soon as you receive them. You do not need to leave a tip.
- You do not have to drink alcohol. Pubs offer soft drinks such as cola, lemonade, orange juice and water. Some pubs also serve tea and coffee.
- You should always have a drink in front of you. It is not OK for only one or two people from a big group of friends to have a drink. If you take all night to drink one drink, the staff in the pub may ask you to leave!
- It may seem odd, but the area of a pub where anyone can open a conversation with anyone else is the area by the bar. However, most tables in a pub are private areas. Pub-goers rarely start up conversations with people at the next table, unless one group has a child or dog with them. Yes, many pubs allow pet dogs in with their owners. They usually lie under the table: the dogs, not their owners! Pub 'rules' are complex. For more, see the Cultural Awareness pages on the Kestrel Connect website.
- Smoking is not permitted in pubs. Both smokers and pub owners can face a fine if people smoke there. If you want to smoke you'll have to go outside.

Watching football and other sports

Most people watch sports on TV either at home or at the local pub. Many go to watch 'live' sports, especially football, rugby and cricket. Horse racing is also very popular, and many people like to gamble on the results of the races. They do this online or at a betting shop (aka bookmaker's), where you can also bet on other sports. Football is very important to some British people, and there can be friction and arguments between supporters of rival clubs. The biggest rivalry is usually between two clubs from the same city, such as Liverpool FC and Everton, or from nearby towns, such as Portsmouth and Southampton. It is not a good idea to go into a Portsmouth pub wearing a Southampton football shirt, for example. People also enjoy watching snooker, golf, motor racing and darts.

Playing sports

Amateur football is popular and many towns and cities have a Sunday League for local teams. There is a wide choice of other sports to take part in, such as tennis, squash, swimming and exercising in the gym. Most towns have Leisure Centres that are much cheaper than gyms or health clubs, but the facilities may not be as good. Ask staff at your school, college or university about opportunities to take part in sports.

Shopping

In Britain, most inner-city or town-centre shops are open seven days a week, but large stores can only open for 6 hours on a Sunday. Most open from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm or 11 am to 5 pm. Some supermarkets in bigger towns are open 24 hours, but most smaller shops close at 5.30 pm. This is probably much earlier than in your country, but remember that shops usually open at 9am and do not close for lunch. In summer and before Christmas, some shopping centres will have 'late night' opening until 8 or 9 pm. You will not see many small independent shops in town and city centres. It is less common than in the past to find bakeries or butchers, because most British people buy bread and meat at the supermarket. Town centres are now filled with chain stores, and if you visit other town centres you will see the same shops again and again.

You may also be surprised by customer service in Britain. It is not usual for someone to say 'hello' to you when you walk into a shop, and sometimes shop assistants can seem unhelpful and unfriendly. Of course, some shops are better than others. In all shops though, as everywhere in Britain, you will need to queue up to pay. Most shops in Britain do not ask you to hand in shopping bags before you walk around. However, do not put anything in your bag or your pockets that you have not paid for. The security staff will think you are 'shoplifting', which means trying to steal. Use a shopping basket or trolley provided by the store.



7 Social Life and Society

Shopping online

More and more people in the UK shop online. You can find low prices and good deals with fast delivery services. Remember that when you buy something online you have the right to send it back for any reason within 7 days of receiving it. If you do send anything back, inform the suppliers immediately by email or phone and keep the postal receipt. If you have any problems with shopping online, ask staff at your school, college or university. If you have a host family they may also be able to help.

DIY (Do It Yourself) and gardening

British people are proud of their homes, and many like to spend time making them look nice. They also like to change the colour of the walls or the arrangement of the furniture from time to time. This is DIY, and it is most popular with the over-40s. On Sunday mornings DIY shops and garden centres are very busy, as couples buy wood and paint for their house and plants for the garden. On Sunday afternoons they may put up new shelves in the house or do work in the garden.

Notice how front gardens are for gardening, but not for relaxing or socialising. British people reserve that for the back garden. However, there is an unspoken rule that you can speak to people if they happen to be in their front gardens. A swift 'hello' and a smile from the pavement as you pass by can be an icebreaker with new neighbours.

Evening classes

As you read in the 'Making friends, again' section, evening classes are popular in Britain and you can enrol in all sorts of subjects from flower arranging to car repair, from foreign languages to dancing. Ask staff at your school or college for more information.

Restaurants, the cinema and theatre

Most cities have a wide selection of restaurants, but you might find it difficult to find one specialising in British food. The most common ones are Chinese, Indian and Italian. Some people eat out regularly, and others only do this on special occasions, such as birthdays or wedding anniversaries.

Cinemas might seem expensive in Britain, but you can often save money if you go before 5pm Monday to Friday, or if you have a student card. Some people prefer to rent a DVD, as this is much cheaper. It's important to realise that the advertised starting time isn't the time the film starts; you will see around 20 minutes of adverts and trailers (advertising future films) before the film starts. Sometimes you can sit anywhere, but in other cinemas you may be asked to choose a seat when you buy your ticket. Most large cities have smaller cinemas that show independent or foreign films, as well as large cinemas showing blockbusters. Going to the theatre to see concerts, comedians or plays is also a popular pastime with some people. It is not usual to dress up in special clothes, although some people might do this.





7 Social Life and Society

Study tip

Make notes on how British people spend their leisure time. Ask yourself these questions:

- How much time do British people spend watching TV?
- What are the most popular types of programmes?
- Do the people you know spend more time playing than watching sport?
- How do British shopping habits compare with those in your country?
- How important is the pub to social life in Britain?

Relations between men and women in the UK

Nowadays, almost all women continue to work after they get married, and many do the same after they have children. This is not only for financial reasons: women in Britain enjoy their independence and freedom. This means that many women do not expect men to pay for things, such as meals in restaurants. They do not wait until they are married to leave home, and just as many women as men go to university. Some men still think of women as 'the weaker sex' but most show them respect. You should not be surprised to see women doing many things that men do, such as playing football, driving buses and drinking pints of beer in pubs! It is common to see men and women walking hand in hand, perhaps even hugging and kissing in public. However, you won't see many same-sex couples holding hands, and 'straight' men don't usually touch other men, except to shake hands. In the UK, if two men kiss or hold hands, people think this means they are homosexual, or gay.

Homosexuality is not illegal and if you live in a big city there will be at least one gay pub. Some people are quite relaxed about homosexuality, and on television there are several popular gay comedians. However, other people are unpleasant, and sometimes violent, to gay people. This is why many prefer to keep their sexuality secret.

Clothes and the weather

The weather in Britain changes from day to day and season to season, so you may need some new clothes. Temperatures can go below 0°C in winter and up to 30°C in summer, but these are extremes. The average

high temperature in London is 21°C and the average low is 12°C. It often rains, but not every day, and strong winds can make it feel colder and wetter. However, Britain is not a cold country compared with, say, Sweden or Norway in winter. In cold and wet weather most people wear a pullover or fleece and a light waterproof jacket. A small umbrella that you can carry in a bag is often useful.

What people wear

There is not really a 'British National Dress' that everyone wears on special occasions, and the image of a businessman in a suit with a bowler hat and umbrella is long out of date. Many British people of all ages dress casually. Men and women of 60 or older may wear jeans, trainers and T-shirts. For work, of course, many men wear suits and ties. Women wear suits with either skirts or smart trousers. Fashions change very quickly in the UK and young people often wear new styles for short periods of time. Do not be frightened by these styles of dress or by tattoos. Some people may have tattoos, shaved heads or unusual clothes, but this does not mean that they are criminals. A lot of older people who now wear business suits used to be influenced by certain fashions or were members of teen tribes, such as Mods, Rockers, Skinheads, Punks, Goths and fanatical football supporters.



'Who are those people, Grandad?'

'That was Grandma and me in our twenties.'



7 Social Life and Society

A democratic society

Britain is a democratic society. All adults over the age of 18 have the right to vote. Each Member of Parliament (MP) is elected to represent the people in an area of the United Kingdom. The MPs sit in the House of Commons at Parliament in Westminster, London. They represent the interests of the people who elected them and decide on new laws for the country as a whole. The Prime Minister is the head of the government. He or she is usually the leader of the largest Party elected to the House of Commons. No Prime Minister can govern for longer than five years without calling an election. The monarch, at present Queen Elizabeth II, is the head of state. Voters elect Councillors to carry on the business of local government. Elections take place every four years.

There is a right to free speech in a democracy. British people have the right to express their opinions freely. However, it is against the law to express racism and religious hatred or to encourage violence against others. Newspapers, TV and radio also have the right to free speech. Like everyone else, they must not break the law. You will find a variety of newspapers in the UK. Some, like 'The Times', 'The Guardian', 'The Independent', and 'The Daily Telegraph', aim to cover important stories in a serious way. Others, like the 'Sun', the 'Daily Mirror', and the 'Daily Mail' aim to be more popular and sensational. For example, they print gossip and stories about celebrities, or famous people. The newspapers are privately owned and they are free to express opinions about the Royal Family, politicians and political parties.

Study tips

To get an idea of free and open debate in Britain you could watch a TV programme like 'Question Time' on BBC 1. This is usually shown on Thursdays at about 11pm. Or you could listen to 'Any Questions' on BBC Radio 4, at 8pm on Fridays or 1.15pm on Saturdays. A good idea would be to record the programmes so that you can stop and go back if you want to listen to something again. This will give you a good idea of the main topics of interest in Britain each week. Look at a variety of British newspapers and decide which one you like most.

The state, public services and the law

British people pay taxes to the state and to local government. In return the state provides services. These include the National Health Service (NHS), education, the police, state pensions and welfare benefits for people who need them. Local government services include road repairs, rubbish collection, and leisure facilities such as swimming pools and playing fields. The police are there to serve and help the public. If you need directions you can ask a policeman or woman. If you find yourself in trouble you can telephone the police for help, or you can go to a police station. Remember, they are there to help you. Many branches of British government, such as social services, the legal system and the police, are there to protect people who are vulnerable or not safe in some way. They try to protect children from violence, women from discrimination, and minorities from racial or religious hatred. Therefore it is important to treat and respect women as equals. It is also important to respect people with different customs or religious beliefs.

In the UK it is said that one can judge a society by the way it treats its most vulnerable citizens. That is why it is very bad manners in Britain to be unkind to anyone who has a physical or mental disability. On the contrary, most people try to be kind. For example, they help people in wheelchairs to cross busy streets or go through doorways.



7 Social Life and Society

Obeying the law

It is important to obey the laws of any country you visit. For example, it is against the law in the UK to drive a car without tax, insurance or an International Driving Licence. UK traffic police work hard and catch a lot of illegal drivers every day. It is also illegal to offer money to a police officer as a bribe. It is also against the law to rent a flat and leave before the date agreed in the contract. If you are not sure how long you will stay, talk to the landlord or flat owner before you sign a contract. Remember that the staff at your school or college are ready to help if you need advice about signing legal documents. If in doubt, ask before you sign.

Important!

You must be at least 18 years old to sign a contract in the UK. If you are not 18 you should ask staff at your school/college or your host family to help you.

Every person with a TV set must buy a TV Licence. If you decide to buy a TV, the shop assistant will ask for your name and address so that the TV Licensing Authority can check you have a licence. Even if you are staying with a host family, you need to buy a licence if you buy your own TV or watch TV in real time on your laptop. You do not need a licence to listen to radio programmes. For more information and for current licence fees visit the Kestrel Connect website.



8 Important Information

Before taking off

Applications, passports and visas

- Students from the European Economic Area (EEA) and Swiss nationals do not need visas to study in the UK.
- Non-EEA and Swiss nationals will need visas. Ask staff at the British Embassy, Consulate or High Commissioner in your own country what visas and other documents you will need.

You can find up-to-date information here:
www.ukcisa.org

or here:

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontentapplicationforms/pbs/Tier4migrantguidance.pdf>

- Apply to the school, college or university where you want to study.
- When you are accepted you will need a 'Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies' (CAS) document from the school, college or university.
- Make sure you have all visas and other banking, financial and insurance documents you will need.
- It is very important that you are able to transfer money easily and quickly between your home country and the UK. Make sure these facilities are in place.
- Ensure your passport is valid and will continue to be valid during your stay in Britain.
- Nationals of EEA countries may use an Identity Card instead of a passport when entering the country. However it is a good idea to carry your passport as well. UK Immigration Officers may like to see both.

For more information you can visit;
<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

- If you want or need to work during your time in the UK find out before you leave, how many hours a week you will be allowed to work. It is important to follow the rules once you are in the UK.

Money

- Find out how much money you are allowed to take out of your home country for your stay in the UK.
- The school, college or university will certainly ask you to pay a deposit (part of the fees and accommodation costs in advance).
- Ask which method of payment is most suitable.
- It can take time to transfer money from one country to another. Ask your bank how long it will take. Give yourself enough time to start and complete the process in time.
- Remember that you may have to pay the rest of the fees and accommodation costs when you arrive. It is important that the money you need is ready and waiting in the UK.
- Don't forget to take evidence of your transferred funds with you. Carry the bank documents in a safe place. Immigration Officers may ask to see them when you arrive.
- Carry enough cash for your journey and for a short time after your arrival until you can access your money at the bank. Do not carry a lot of cash. You may lose it or it may be stolen.
- If you carry a credit card, keep it safe. Do not let anyone else know or see the personal identification number (PIN) for your credit card.





8 Important Information

- It would be a good idea to bring several passport size photos with you. It will probably save you time and money getting new ones shortly after your arrival and you will almost certainly want to get a travel card and join the Students' Union, etc.

Prices

The prices you see in the shops are fixed. You cannot ask to pay a lower price. If you don't like a price, you may find it cheaper elsewhere. 'Discussing the price' in English is called bargaining or 'haggling'. The British do not bargain about the prices in shops. However, you can do this in some open-air markets and car boot sales, or when you buy something which is used or second-hand. You can get lower prices if you pay with cash, but you have fewer rights if the item you buy turns out to be faulty or problematic in some way. Paying by credit card gives you rights to return the item and have your money refunded. Take care when negotiating money matters with staff at your school, college or university, or with your host family. Negotiating is usually fine, but bargaining (in the sense of trying to beat down the price) may upset or embarrass them.

Insurance

- It is important that you have health insurance during your stay. Check if there is an agreement between your country and the UK to provide health care for each other's nationals. This is called a 'reciprocal health agreement'.
- If there is not an agreement, you can take out health insurance before you leave your country. However, before you do this, check with your school, college or university about health care insurance and health care providers they recommend for their students. Some universities have medical schools located in certain hospitals that offer excellent care and support.
- You can buy insurance to recover the costs of fees and accommodation in case you are unable to complete your course.
- You can insure your possessions against loss, theft or damage. There are insurers that specialise in services for students. Ask staff at your institution or Student's Union for recommendations.

Information about your arrival

- If you are going to study at an English language school it is important to tell the school or college about your travel arrangements. You can do this in an e-mail. For example...

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms (last name)

I am enrolled on your (subject) course starting on (date). I am arriving at (name) airport on Flight No (number) on (day and date). My plane should arrive at (time). I will continue my journey by train/coach/ bus/ taxi and I expect to arrive at (time).

Yours sincerely,
(Your name)

- If you are staying with a host family make sure you have their contact details (name, address, email, telephone number) so that you can tell them your arrival times and method of travel. You can write to your host as follows...

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms (last name)

I understand I will be staying with you during my studies at (name of school or college). I am arriving at (name) airport on Flight No (number) on (day and date). My plane should arrive at (time). I will continue my journey by train/coach/ bus/taxi and I expect to arrive at your house at about (time). I will contact you if there is a delay or problem. My mobile telephone number is (your number).

Yours sincerely,
(Your name)

- Many schools, colleges and universities have 'meet and greet' services that arrange to collect you from the airport and take you to your accommodation. Check if this service is available to you.
- If you are making your own way from the airport to your accommodation, make sure you know directions and the best way to travel. If you travel by train in the UK, it is important to make sure you are on the correct train according to the travel time given on the ticket. The extra fare for being on the wrong train can be very expensive.



8 Important Information

Immigration

As soon as you decide to study in Britain, visit your nearest British Embassy or High Commission in your own country (or visit the relevant website) to find out exactly what the visa and immigration rules are for you. To find your nearest British Embassy or High Commission click [here](#). You can also find a lot of up-to-date information on the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) website. Click [here](#).

Working in the UK

You may be allowed to work in the UK while you are a student. Check what the sticker in your passport says. You can ask staff at British Embassies, High Commissions or your school/college/university in Britain to explain if and for how long you may work in the UK. Remember that it is important to understand and follow the rules. For good online guides click [here](#) or [here](#).

Documents you will need

The documents you will need to present to Immigration officials in the UK when you arrive are:

- Your passport and visa.
- Your 'Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies' from the school, college or university.
- The bank documents that show you have enough money for your stay.
- If you are travelling with a member or members of your family for whom you are responsible, you must also show that you have enough money for their stay.

After touching down

When entering the UK at an airport, seaport or railway station, you will need to join the right queue. There is usually one for EEA and Swiss nationals and another queue for everyone else. If you travel to the UK on a Eurostar train, immigration procedures take place before boarding in Brussels and Paris. When you speak to British officials it is important to stay calm and tell the truth. Give them straight answers to straight questions. Never try to give them money or gifts. If your home language is written in a non-Latin script, such as Cyrillic or Arabic, it is useful to decide how you will write and sign your name in English.

Do not change that spelling and signature while you are in the UK. Make sure that other people use the same spelling if they write down your name. This will avoid confusion.

Going through Customs

If you have only your personal luggage, you should have no problems with Customs. Do not try to bring any of the following into the country.

- Weapons such as rifles, pistols, air- or gasguns, knives, and martial arts equipment. They are almost all illegal in the UK.
- Drugs such as heroin, morphine, cocaine, amphetamines, barbiturates, LSD and cannabis.
- Counterfeit and pirated goods, such as watches, clocks and CDs, and any goods with false marks of their origin. For more information click [here](#).
- If you want to bring a pet animal into the UK, make sure you visit the following website first by clicking [here](#).



Why do they always pick on us?



8 Important Information

Travel in Britain

- If you take a taxi from the airport to a train or coach station, or to the town where you will study, try to find out in advance how much this should cost. The Welfare and Accommodation Officer or the Enrolment Officer at your school or college should be able to tell you. You can ask by letter or e-mail.
- Local public transport in Britain is not expensive and you will be able to buy tickets for the day, week or month, which is cheaper than buying tickets for each journey. When you arrive ask your host family or staff at the school or college for advice.
- Train journeys, on the other hand, can be expensive, especially at certain times of day. Ask someone at your school or college about how to get cheaper tickets, but do this one week or more before you need to buy them.
- You may be able to hire a bicycle, motor scooter or car. Ask staff or fellow students for advice on getting a good price. However, if you drive a car, motorbike, scooter or moped, make sure you have the necessary road tax, driving licence and insurance. It is illegal to drive without these. Punishments include large fines and, in some cases, even imprisonment.

Your Safety

Britain is quite a safe country, but you still need to be careful. In your country people may be more honest and helpful in some situations. The following tips should help you to avoid difficulties during your stay:

- Mobile phone theft happens, especially in big cities. Do not walk along the street talking on your mobile phone or leave it on tables in cafés.
- Another reason for not talking on your phone in a street is that plenty of people get hurt because they are more concerned with a phone call than avoiding a lamp post, bench, person or vehicle. Visitors to the UK often look the wrong way first when crossing a road. Remember that vehicles are driven on the left. It helps if you are not talking on a mobile as you cross streets.
- Never leave your coat or bag on your seat in any public place, such as a cinema, café or train. If you go to the toilet, take your valuable things with you. Don't ask a stranger to watch them for you.
- In some town and city centres, you may see a lot of drunken people, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights. Most of them will not say or do anything, but one or two may be unpleasant. The police are working hard to improve this situation. If you feel uncomfortable, don't get involved - just walk away. Ask staff at your school or college about which places are safer and more friendly than others.
- Never walk alone late at night or in the early morning, especially along quiet streets, alleyways or through parks.



Useful Links

News, information, education and culture in the UK

Kestrel Connect (www.kestrelconnect.co.uk)

The British Council (www.britishcouncil.org)

UK Council for International Student Affairs (www.ukcisa.org.uk)

National Union of Students (NUS) (www.nus.org.uk/en/students-unions)

The BBC (www.bbc.co.uk)

Going Places

National Rail - UK railways (www.nationalrail.co.uk)

Stagecoach - coach and bus travel (www.stagecoachbus.com)

National Express - bus and coach services (www.nationalexpress.com)

Visit Britain - where to go, where to stay (www.visitbritain.com)

National Trust - places to visit (www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

Youth Hostels (www.yha.org.uk)

Guides to what's on in the UK

Across the UK (www.list.co.uk and www.whatson.co.uk)

London (www.timeout.com/london)

Government Departments

For information about visas (www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk)

The Foreign Office - know where your Embassy is:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-embassies-in-the-uk

The Home Office - for information about British law and the legal system (www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

The National Health Service (www.nhs.uk)

Department responsible for Higher Education (www.gov.uk/government/topics/higher-education)

Personal Safety

For advice on staying safe in the UK (www.educationuk.org/global/articles/safety/)

Help!

To call the emergency services for police, fire brigade and ambulance or paramedics the telephone number is 999. You can call the same number for coastguard, mountain and cave rescue services. You can also ring the pan-European emergency number 112. For fast medical help that is not an emergency you can call 111.



A practical and cultural guide for international students in the UK

Anthony Cutler and Jill Doubleday

ISBN 10: 0-9548840-7-8

ISBN 13: 978-0-9548840-7-9

EAN: 9780954884079

Illustrations – Joanna Howells

Cover design and layout – Claire Siggery - www.clairestudio.co.uk

Photo credits. All Fotolia.com unless stated otherwise.

Chapter 1: © mangostock, wong yu liang; **Chapter 3:** © Light Impression, © detailblick, © Michael Pettigrew; **Chapter 4:** © xixinxing, © Gino Santa Maria; © auremar; **Chapter 5:** © fazon, © Irina Zolina; © Jaimie Duplass; **Chapter 6:** © Rido, © Kirill Kedrinski, © Robert Kneschke; **Chapter 7:** © Monkey Business, © Anthony Childs-Cutler

First published 2005

Revised 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012

Second Edition 2013

Kestrel Books Ltd

2 Cwrt Isaf
Tythegston
Bridgend
Wales, UK

Telephone: + 44 (0)1656 784021

Email: office@kestrelconnect.co.uk

Web: www.kestrelconnect.co.uk and www.kestrel-books.co.uk



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written consent of Kestrel Books Ltd. This educational material is sold on the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior written permission in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.