

Useful Guides for International Students Coming to University of Birmingham

• Travelling within the University and out to the City Centre

A map will always be useful especially during the initial period of arrival in Birmingham University. Maps of the University will usually be given out to students during the Welcome Week and copies can be obtained from the Housing Services.

Maps of the City Centre can be obtained free at the Tourist Information Centre in the City or you can purchase an A-Z Birmingham Guide from most bookshops.

Transport

- **Train** will be the more convenient option for travelling to the City Centre via New Street Station which is only two stops away from the University Train Station. Purchasing a Young Person Rail Card at any train station will entitle you to a discount of 25%.

- **Bus** will be an alternative way to the City. Bus number 44 travels from the University to the City and there is free travel for 44 from The Vale Accommodation via University to Selly Oak Campus (A free bus-pass is obtainable from the Housing Services and University Halls of Residence sites but there is no free service to the city). You can also take bus number 61, 62 and 63 from Bristol Road to the City. Most bus timetables will be available in Housing Services.
No change is given on buses in Birmingham so ensure you produce the exact fare.

For more information about travel along with prices please visit:

<http://www.networkwestmidlands.com/Mobility/Concessionary.html>

• Banking

It is not a good idea to carry around large sums of money and you would therefore be well advised to open a bank account as soon as possible. Choose a branch of one of the main banks, which is convenience in opening times and location. You will find branches of the following banks on campus and each has a cash dispensing point.

Barclays	09.30-16.30 10.00-16.30	Monday to Friday excl. Wednesdays Wednesdays
Lloyds	09.30-16.30	Monday to Friday
HSBC	09.30-15.30	Monday to Friday
Natwest	09.30-15.30 10.00-15.30	Monday to Friday excl. Wednesday Wednesdays

All times are subject to change, during vacation times etc.

Opening an Account

When you go to open an account always take the following items with you:

1. Passport
2. University Letter and ID Card
3. Proof of Address
4. Cash (Some Bank's will require immediately deposit of fund into the account)

Current Account

The most useful account is the current account. You can pay in money received in any form and then draw it out when you need it. Usually Student Accounts are free of charge; provided that you keep your account in credit (some banks like Barclay and HSBC will require a minimum amount in the bank account usually around £1000 to £3000). Most banks will have a fixed limit on the amount you can drawout in a single day. If you need to draw more than that amount, you will need to make a request at the bank and it usually takes around 3 working days.

Saving Account

Money you do not need immediately can be placed in a deposit account, which could earn a higher interest than the current account. You cannot issue cheques from your deposit account but it is still possible to withdraw cash from the account via cash machines.

Credit Card and Cheques

Some banks do offer student credit cards and cheque books on certain accounts which you will need to check with the individual bank. Foreign or local cheques that are paid in usually will take around 3-5 working days to clear for the money to go into your account.

Cash Dispensing Machines

Many banks provide cash dispensing machines for use when the bank is closed or crowded. All banks will issue a cash card which will allow you to draw up to £250 from the dispensing machine. You will be given a personal P.I.N number which has to be keyed in at the machine every time you wish to withdraw money. You could change your P.I.N onto other personal number at the cash machine. If at anytime you suspect anyone know yours P.I.N, get it change immediately.

Foreign Currency

Travellers' cheques or foreign currency can be cashed at any bank or official money changer such as Marks and Spencer, Western Union etc. Do not change money with anyone who appears to be suspicious or offer money changing services on the street.

Rules and Regulations

International Students should take note that the regulations of the banks in UK may be different from your home country especially regarding overdraft charges, late payment, direct debit etc. So it is advisable always to read through all the terms and conditions for all bank accounts you set up.

Plan your spending

Try not to get overdraw without careful budget planning as student then exceeds their overdraft limit. For student who have credit card, it is advisable to use it wisely and do not spent over your limit as all bank imposed a penalty or interest for overdraft and credit card bills that is not clear within the period given.

- **Life-styles :Going Out, Eating Out and Grocery Shopping**

Be prepared for the fun and excitement awaiting you in Birmingham as the second largest city in England. Interesting places like Jewellery Quarter, Cadbury World, National Sea life etc are definitely worth visiting. Birmingham also has a vibrant night life with pubs, clubs and discos situated on Broad Street and in the City Centre. Oceana, Ridley and The Works are currently the popular clubs for student but those are only examples of the many varieties available here. To enter the club, you need to be above 18, and some of them will need a certain dress code

For movie lovers, we have the major Multi-Cineplex in Birmingham likes Odeon in City Centre, AMC in Broadway Plaza and CineWorld in Broad Street.

The major shopping district will be the City Centre whereby the major shopping centres comprise of the Bull Ring (one of the biggest in UK), The Pavilion and The Pallasades. There is a range of fantastic shops such as Marks and Spencer, House of Fraser (The biggest outside London), H & M, Adidas etc along New Street and the Corporation Street Area. You can buy anything from one pound items at The Pound Land (in The Pallasades) to designer clothing at Selfridges (in the Bullring).

The Bullring, one of the biggest shopping centres in the UK, is the major shopping centre in Birmingham which incorporates brands such as Selfridges, Armani Exchange, H& M, Druckers, Starbucks, Border etc just to name a few. At the heart of City Centre, it is definitely a place that will provide unlimited shopping joy and eating for all students. Information available at <http://www.bullring.co.uk/website/>

The Mailbox is the high end shopping centre where shops such as Armani and Hugo Boss are located. There are also a variety of restaurants such as Shogun Teppanyaki, Zizzi etc everyone will be spoilt for choice. <http://www.mailboxlife.com/home-lifestyle/free-restaurant-voucher/>

Broadway Plaza is basically an entertainment multiplex that has everything under one roof from AMC Cinema, Frankie and Benny, Chinese Restaurant Dragon BBQ, Pool, Bowling, Gym etc all in one place. <http://www.broadway-plaza.com/>

As a student, always remember to go to www.studentbeans.com for discounts and the latest promotion for going out and food.

○ Pubs and clubs

Pubs and clubs are an important part of the British social life. However, these may not fit most international students' cultures or lifestyles. In all cases, be it at a friend's home or in a pub, there is no obligation to drink more than you want, or to have an alcoholic drink at all if you don't want it. It is very easy to ask for a non-alcoholic drink such as soft drinks and fruit juices in pubs and clubs. Alternatively there are other evening activities such as playing pool, bowling, going for movies at the cinema or having supper at a friend's house which may be better suited for some international students.

○ Eating Out

Being the second largest city, Birmingham is a cosmopolitan city that provides a vast variety of food choices. Our most famous place for eating out, if you are a curry lover, will definitely be the Balti Triangle where a whole row of award winning Balti Restaurants are available. <http://www.balti-birmingham.co.uk/balti-triangle.asp>. There are also a whole range of Balti Curry Restaurants available in Broad Street and Bristol Road that as famous and definitely will fill the curry urge you may have.

For students who love Chinese food, the more authentic and exclusive Chinese food will be able to be found at Chung Yin Garden, China Court, Golden Pond etc in China Town. However besides those more expensive restaurant mentioned earlier, there are also other restaurants like Noodlebar, Peach Garden, Malaysian Delight that provide authentic Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore style Chinese food which are just as delicious. If you prefer a buffet then restaurants such as Chow Ba, Wok Mania, and Big Wok definitely will be what you are looking for and is great value for money.

Another popular food that everyone loves will be Japanese food. Highly recommended is the newly open Mount Fuji located in the Bullring Shopping Centre that serve authentic Japanese food such as bento set and Japanese curry. Shogun Teppanyaki located at Brindley Place and Mailbox are also worth visiting especially if you love teppanyakki. Yo-Sushi in Selfridges has excellent sushi however it is at a slightly higher price.

Other varieties are Italian food in Bella Italia along New Street, Nando Chicken, Pizza Express or Krispy Kreme in Bullring. Alternatively, if you prefer fine dining, there are also award winning French restaurant Brasserie Blanc or the finest Italian restaurant Cielo in Brindley Place. More information will be available at <http://www.brindleyplace.com/whats-here/restaurants>.

○ **Grocery Shopping**

Now that you are studying abroad and away from home, cooking may seem to be a very daunting task, especially if you are not familiar with British food. However, it is important to stay healthy with a balanced diet.

You can buy all ingredients for cooking at home including raw meats, vegetables, herbs, spices as well as fruits and daily groceries such as milk and snacks at local supermarkets. The big supermarkets sell most food and some general household items. It is worth noting that they do vary in prices, for example Aldi, Pound Land, Iceland and Home Bargain are cheaper than for example Sainsbury's, Tescos and Asda.

List of accessible supermarkets where students mainly shop near the campus:

- Tesco express on Bristol Road and in City Centre (Train or Bus 61, 62, 63)
- Tesco supermarket in Five Ways (Train or Bus 21, 44)
- Sainsbury in Selly Oak (Bus 21, 44, 11)
- Aldi supermarket on Bristol Road (Within walking distance from University)

Many of the larger supermarkets do now supply Halal and Kosher foods. Please ask in store for availability.

● **Health**

General information:

- **Water-** All tap water in Britain is drinkable unless otherwise indicated (e.g. on trains)
- Remember to **eat healthily** especially now that you are living by yourself and students often skip meals as a result of busy schedule and idea of cooking for yourself may seem troublesome to some students too. Alternatively, you may probably enjoy the relaxation of making and eating a meal with a friend.
- Students often drink a great deal of **coffee** everyday and especially during exam periods. Fruit juice makes a good alternative if coffee does not suit you.
- **Regular exercise** is also very important. There are many sporting activities available on campus and from the Munrow Sports Centre as well as sports clubs and events to participate in. Don't be tempted to study for long periods completely on your own, as your health would suffer if you see little each day beyond the four walls of your room or laboratory. Some sociable activities or just regular exercises such as swimming, cycling, jogging, or just going for a walk would help you to enjoy life more and will actually improve your academic work. For more information please visit <http://www.sport.bham.ac.uk/membershipandfacilities/>

Health Care

You should register with a General Practitioner (GP) clinic close to your accommodation, soon after your arrival in the UK. The University has its own medical practice. To find out more about the University Medical Practice and to view the Practice boundary, please visit its website at <http://www.theump.co.uk>. To register with the University Medical Practice, you must live within the area of the University.

If you do not register with the University Medical Practice, you can register with any GP surgery in the area surrounding the University. Some GP surgeries already have many patients and may not be able to take on any more. If you are unable to register with your local GP surgery, ask them to recommend another surgery close by, or try another GP surgery on the list. To find your nearest doctor please visit the NHS website at <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/find/results/index.aspx>

For GP's, you will need to book an appointment in advance usually a week before, if you have an emergency, you can either call on the day itself or visit the hospital A & E department. Nearest Hospital is the Selly Oak Hospital as Queen Elizabeth Hospital does not have an A & E department.

Dental care

Once you are in the UK, you should try to have your teeth checked by a dentist at least once a year. You can ask for a list of local dentists who give NHS treatment from Academic and Student Administration or the International Office. The University has its own Dental Practice, which will treat all University of Birmingham students as NHS patients.

With other dental practices, you will need to be registered with a doctor in order to qualify for NHS dental treatment (where the Government subsidises the cost of treatment); otherwise you will have to pay the full cost. Once you have registered with a doctor, you will receive a medical card by post, which will include your NHS number. You should contact your dentist and ask if they accept NHS patients (some only accept private patients). If you are accepted you will use your NHS number when booking an appointment and appointments also need to be book in advance unless emergency cases.

To find your nearest dentist visit the [NHS website](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/find/results/index.aspx) at <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/find/results/index.aspx>

Opticians

If you need to see an optician, you can go to any Opticians. You will normally have to pay a minimum charge for an eye test on the NHS unless you are in full-time study or under 19. If the test shows you need glasses or contact lenses, the optician will give you a prescription. Some Optical Shop do offer free eyes test for all customer so long as you buy the frames and lenses from them.

Cost of Treatment

If your course of study is for six months or more, you and your dependants will qualify for NHS treatment from the beginning of your stay. This includes free treatment in NHS hospitals. Treatment is also free with any GP that you register as a patient. GP's and hospitals usually do not provide medicine unless necessary and you will require to obtain medicine in pharmacy most of the time.

European Economic Area nationals studying in the UK for less than six months

EEA national students and any accompanying family members should fill out form E128 in their country of residence. This form entitles the holder and his or her family to full NHS treatment on the same basis as students who are studying for six months or more.

Non EEA nationals studying in the UK for less than six months

and any accompanying family members will not be entitled to free NHS hospital treatment, except in emergencies. GP's may agree to treat you for free, but this will usually be limited to urgent treatment that cannot be delayed until you return home. You will have to pay for any other treatment as a private patient. It is therefore very important that you take out medical insurance for the duration of your visit to the UK. If you do not have insurance, private treatment could prove very expensive.

You may also be able to claim for help towards health costs on the grounds of low income. Ask your GP surgery for a HC1 form, or request a form online: www.ppa.org.uk (do a search for HC1 form). Health benefits are not classed as 'public funds'. Your immigration status will not be affected if you claim and receive any help with health costs.

For further information please refer to the UKCOSA Guide '[Keeping Healthy](#)'.

Further information regarding general healthcare could be found on the following website from the International Office:

<http://www.international.bham.ac.uk/healthcare.htm#registerdoctor3>

- **Mobile phone**

Mobile phone contracts may be a bit more complicated in UK than your home country. The major service providers are O2, Orange, Vodafone, Virgin, Three and T-Mobile and the two major mobile phone dealers are Phone4you and Carphonewarehouse which are located all of them in City Centre. You will normally get a free phone with any 18 months contract. The higher the monthly payment is, the more likely you will get a better phone. However, the current regulations need proof of permanent address proof usually a letter from the University, credit card statement or a letter from the bank and passport before you can signed a contract. Some shops will not offer a contract to students who stay in UK for less than three years. For students who have just arrived, it is advisable to get a pay as you go sim card from any provider and only get a contract after you have a British bank account.

- **Television Licences**

Every television set used in the UK must be covered by a television licence. So if you have your own TV in your own room then you will have to have a TV licence. This applies to private residence as well as students' halls of residence. If you live in private rented accommodation with other students, you may only need one licence for the house even if you have a TV in your own room. However you may be made liable for a TV in the common room even if it does not belong to you as long as you signed a joint tenancy agreement with your housemates.

The cost of a TV licence is currently £45.50 for a black and white TV and £135.50 for a colour set. If you do not have a licence and are prosecuted by TV Licensing, you will be fined up to a maximum of £1000. More information available <http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/information/students.jsp#link3>

- **Council Tax**

Council tax is a tax payable on dwellings. Money raised from Council Tax funds local services, such as the Police, the Fire Brigade and Libraries. Full-time students do not have to pay Council Tax as Halls of Residence and dwellings occupied by students are exempt. However, if you live with someone over 18 who is not your dependent or a full time student, the dwelling will then become liable for Council Tax and it is the responsibility of every adult in the dwelling to pay Council Tax.

If you are a full time student, you could apply to the City Council to be exempted from Council Tax. You would need to obtain a Council Tax Exemption Certificate either issued from your department or you could get it from Student Services in the Aston Webb Building. You would then need to fill in a Council Tax Exemption Form which could be obtained from the Housing Services in the University centre and send it off together with the certificate or certificates if there are several students living in one house, to the City Council.

If you receive a bill for Council Tax, do not ignore it. You could contact the Council Tax Exemption at Birmingham City Council on 0121 235 5724.

• **Trips from Birmingham**

Birmingham and the West Midlands are often known as the ‘heart of England’ as it is situated in the centre of Britain; hence it is much more convenient for students to travel to other cities in Britain

Day trips are very enjoyable and inexpensive for a short break during the weekend after a long hectic week of study. The coach lines and railways systems make it very convenient and accessible to visit interesting places like Bath, Bristol, the Malvern Hills, Oxford, Cambridge, Stratford and Warwick. It is also possible to book your transportations online at

www.nationalrail.co.uk for train services

www.nationalexpress.com for coaches

Also there are various day trips organised by the EISU especially for students throughout the year which could be found at

<http://www.eisu.bham.ac.uk/daytrips.shtml>

London

Every student would visit London at some point during their stay in Birmingham for various reasons, such as visiting your embassy, friends or families, celebration of certain festivals or just for sightseeing. It is definitely worth visiting London as its city lifestyle London is notably different and much more vibrant than Birmingham. There are several well-known tourist attraction points or activities to do such as:

1. Big Ben
2. Double-decker bus rides
3. The West End areas such as Covent Garden, Leicester Square, Piccadilly Square, Soho, Chinatown.
4. Enjoy an ‘Afternoon Tea’ of clotted cream and jam on scones at any Café.
5. Shopping: Harrods at Knightsbridge, Oxford Street, Regent Street, Covent Garden, Portobello Garden (flea market).
6. Parks: Hyde Park, Kensington Palace Gardens, Regent’s Park, and the parks near Buckingham Palace.
7. Palaces: Buckingham Palace, Kensington Palace, Windsor.
8. Churches: St Paul’s Church, Westminster Abbey.
9. Museums: British Museum, Victoria & Albert, Natural History, Science.
10. Tower of London.

Travelling to Europe

There are several economical and affordable airlines which offer cheap flight tickets to majority of the European countries such as Italy, Spain, Amsterdam, Germany etc. It is possible to book and purchase the tickets online at

www.easyjet.com

www.flybmi.com

www.ryanair.com

Alternatively, you could also be interested in holiday packages. STA offers affordable and reliable holiday packages throughout the year. Since they cater primarily for students, their holiday trips are tailored to meet students' budgets while at the same time students are still able to travel comfortably and to get the best out of their monies. It is possible to browse through their best offers at www.statravel.co.uk

- **Bringing your family to Birmingham**

Before you decide to bring your family to Birmingham, you must calculate the cost of living in the UK for the length of your course, as well as the cost of childcare if appropriate. Only bring your family over if you think that you could support them. The University cannot support students' families and the government provides no financial help. Most important thing to take note is to secure the accommodation for your family either with the University or the private accommodation before you fetch them over because University do not have emergency accommodation to provide for them and hotel or motel will be very expensive. University have limited family accommodation and in the event if you do not obtain any accommodation from us, then it will be best you look at www.birminghamstudentpad.co.uk for private accommodation. If you are unable to secure any accommodation beforehand, then it is advisable you arrive on your own and continue the search for accommodation.

Visa Regulations

Please refer to the relevant section.

English Classes

Details of English classes at local Colleges for students' dependants are available from the English for International Student Unit. <http://www.eisu.bham.ac.uk/>

Further information could be obtained at

http://www.international.bham.ac.uk/pdfs/bringing_family_0708.pdf

• **Religious Practise in Birmingham**

UK is a multi-culture society as such most religions are accepted and practised. It is important to respect other religion practice as much you wish them to respect yours no matter how different a person religion may be as Birmingham University has a vast diversity of religion group studying here.

Most major faiths are represented by a student society at Birmingham. Join one today and meet other students on the spiritual journey. There are Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Sikh societies, among others, all with lively programmes. For Christians, there are Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and several other societies. See the details at the University Multi-Faith Chaplaincy.

<http://www.chaplaincy.bham.ac.uk/students/>

The Guild also provides prayer rooms for Muslim students.

We hope you find this information useful and helpful during your stay. If you wish to add any information/ places of interest/ or things that you think may assist other international students please email your comments to

birminghamstudentpad@contacts.bham.ac.uk