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UKBA STUDENT VISAS

STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR US PASSPORT HOLDERS

From 31 March 2009, only universities, colleges and schools who have registered with the UK Border Agency are able to sponsor international students under Britain's new points system. The introduction of the student tier – Tier 4 – completes the rollout of the Government's new immigration controls.

More than 1,400 universities, independent schools and colleges have signed up to accept international students and have been assessed or visited by UK Border Agency officers as part of the vetting process.

The Government is determined that the new route benefits talented, legitimate students making the most of Britain's world-leading educational institutions. At the same time, we will know who is coming to the UK to study and that institutions take responsibility for ensuring that the students they are bringing into the UK from outside Europe comply with the conditions of their leave to be there.

The information in this document is for US Citizens who have a valid US passport.

Before they go the UK, students may need to apply for a visa at one of the three UKBA visa sections at the British Consulate in New York, Los Angeles or Chicago. They will need to prove they have a place at a licensed institution, that they can financially support themselves and they must provide their fingerprints to the UK Border Agency.



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What is a Student Visa?

A student visa is a secure sticker that is put into your passport or travel document and gives you permission to study in the UK.

How can adult students enter the UK?

US nationals may go to the UK to study as a **student visitor** without a visa providing they do not intend to remain there for more than 6 months, work or change their immigration status.

From 31 March 2009, US nationals will need to apply under **Tier 4** of the new Points Based System (PBS) for a **(General) Student** visa if they intend to study in the UK for over 6 months. US nationals will also need to apply for a Tier 4 (General) student visa if they plan to study for less than 6 months but intend to work in any capacity (paid or unpaid, including internships) in the UK or intend to change their status whilst in the UK.

The Points Based System has been structured to make the application and review process more understandable for students.



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1. **STUDENT VISITORS**

The (Non-PBS) **Student Visitor** category is for students who are 18 years or older who wish to study in the UK for **6 months or less**. Students who enter as a student visitor may not work (including internships, work-placement or work-study) and may not switch their status or extend their stay whilst in the UK. US nationals do not require a visa before arriving in the UK as a student visitor. HOWEVER, student visitors must be prepared to supply the Immigration Officer with the correct documentation (see below). If you plan to undertake any type of employment or internship in the UK during your study period, please apply for a Tier 4 (General) Student visa (information at **2.** below).

Steps to entering the UK as a (Non-PBS) Student Visitor

- As a short-term student entering the UK, you may enter without a visa. However, you must be prepared to show the Immigration Officer at the airport (or other port of entry) that you have been accepted on a course of study by:
 - a) An Accredited Educational Institution
 - b) An institution that holds a Tier 4 Sponsor Licence, or
 - c) US Institution of Higher Education which is delivering only part of its program in the UK and holds its own national accreditation and awards degrees equivalent to those in the UK (eg study abroad programmes).
In order to meet the requirements of being an overseas Higher Education Institution offering programmes at an equivalent of a UK degree, the institution should be recognised by [NARIC](#).



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You will do this by showing an original letter from that institution which confirms that it meets one of the requirements above, provides details about you, that you will be enrolled in classes and will include details regarding the start and end date of the course.

- You will be asked to show the Immigration Officer that you will have the necessary funds to pay for your course fees and support yourself for the entire period you intend to stay in the UK. This can be in the form of scholarship, grant or other financial aid award letters as well as bank statements in your name which are dated no more than one calendar month before you arrive in the UK.
- You will demonstrate your willingness to leave the UK once your course of study is complete by showing return tickets or an itinerary with your name and information on them.
- You must present a valid US Passport that will not expire while you are in the UK.
- You will receive a student visitor stamp/endorsement in your passport when you present your documents.
- If you travel outside the UK during your course of study, show the Immigration Officer your Student Visitor stamp/endorsement (code 5N) and the institution letter when re-entering the UK.
- Students arriving in the UK through **Ireland** should actively seek out an Immigration official upon arrival in the UK to ensure that their passport is



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stamped with the student endorsement.

2. POINTS BASED SYSTEM TIER 4 (GENERAL) STUDENT

Tier 4 (General) Student Visas are for people 17 years or older coming to the UK for all or a portion of their college/university education. The visa application process involves meeting a requirement of 40 points that includes submitting a valid visa letter from a licensed sponsor (30 points) and passing the maintenance and funds test (10 points). Students entering the UK on a Tier 4 General Student Visa will be permitted to work part-time (including internships, work-placement, work study and volunteering) and may apply to have their status changed while in the UK. For more information on work, refer to the Annex at the end of this document. The Tier 4 (General) Student visa may be granted for the entire length of the course (minimum of 1 week to the full length of the course).

Self-Assessment

Before you apply, you are encouraged to use the self-assessment tool on UKBA's website www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk to determine your ability to submit a viable Tier 4 (General) Student visa application. The self-assessment tool is only a guide and does not guarantee that an application will be successful. UKBA will make a decision after receiving all applications in full. If you provide false or fraudulent documents with your study visa application lie or withhold information, you will be refused and may be banned from making further applications for up to 10 years.



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Getting Your Tier 4 General Student Visa

To receive a Tier 4 (General) Student Visa, US passport holders must plan ahead and submit an application to the visa section at the relevant British Consulate in the United States at least 6-8 weeks before their intended departure to the UK. However, you can apply up to 3 months before the start of your course. Be sure not to apply too early or too late. Please visit www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/howtoapply/vafs for all of the forms and other documents needed to apply using Tier 4 of the Points Based System. Please click on the pdf Policy Guidance document at <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk/> for the full guidance for students applying after 31 March 2009.

Steps: Completing and Supporting your Application

- Obtain a visa letter from your UK or US (if study abroad) University confirming your unconditional acceptance on an approved course of study, that the education provider is an approved sponsor, details of the course, course and accommodation fees and documents used to obtain the visa letter.
- Complete your VAF 9 application form + Appendix 8 for a Tier 4 (General) Student visa on-line at www.visa4uk.fco.gov.uk. You will need to have the following on hand:
 - ✓ An active E-mail address.
 - ✓ Your Visa Letter/Offer Letter
 - ✓ Your valid passport



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- ✓ If you know where you will be living in the UK, please have the address.
 - ✓ Your travel itinerary. Date of intended travel to the UK is particularly important.
 - ✓ A valid credit card or debit card to pay for your application and return postage. Please ensure that you tick the 'by mail' box so we can return your passport by UPS overnight delivery. Do not use the 'travel agent use only' box unless you are using a visa agency service/travel agent on our approved lists to expedite your application. If return postage is not paid at the time of on-line payment, the processing of your application will be delayed.
 - ✓ Access to a printer as you will be required to print your on-line Visa Application form and biometrics appointment confirmation (with bar-code) as part of this process.
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- After you complete and pay for your application online, you will be instructed to make a **Biometrics** appointment at one of the 126 Department of Homeland Security Application Support Centres in the US. Biometrics is a digital photograph and an electronic scan of your fingerprints and is not painful or invasive in any way. Be sure to print out your Biometrics appointment confirmation sheet (with barcode) and take this along to your appointment together with your printed application form and original passport. Once you have completed the Biometrics appointment, you should have the confirmation sheet stamped by the centre employee who processed your biometrics. In the US, the date you pay for your visa and schedule your biometrics appointment is deemed the date of your application.
 - After completing the Biometrics appointment, you must send the following list of ORIGINAL documents to the UKBA Visa Section at the relevant



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British Consulate in the US (New York, Los Angeles or Chicago) within two weeks of your biometrics collection:

- (a) ORIGINAL Passport (NO COPIES)
- (b) 2 passport sized photographs (digital print-outs must be on photo paper)
- (c) ORIGINAL Visa Letter from your provider, UK University or College
- (d) ORIGINAL documents used to obtain visa letter. This may include ORIGINAL qualification certificate or receipts for any course fees you have already paid if stated in the visa letter.
- (e) ORIGINAL documentary evidence of funds. All documents (eg bank statements and loan agreements) must be in the applicant's name. A joint account is acceptable providing you are one of the account holders.
- (f) Printed copy of your online application and stamped biometrics confirmation notice.

ALL SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION MUST BE ORIGINAL.

You must provide the correct documents to support your visa application with your application form. We will not contact you if you do not send the correct documents and your application will be refused if incomplete or incorrectly supported.

If, for any reason there is doubt about the authenticity of the documents sent UKBA reserves the right to undertake document verification or other check.

The document(s) will either be confirmed as genuine and the application will be processed as genuine, or confirmed as false and rejected.



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When to expect your Passport with Visa

We aim that your visa application will be processed and decided by UK Border Agency staff within 15 days of receipt at the relevant visa office (and 10 days after opening). However, in our high volume periods such as the summer, it is likely to take longer. Please note that mail may not be opened immediately on receipt at the Consulate and applicants may not receive confirmation of receipt of their package in the visa section until up to 5 days after receipt.

Validity of Visa

Your visa will be granted for the entire length of your course. Additional time will be added before and after the course dates to allow you to settle your affairs as follows:

Short-term courses (less than 6 months): 7 days before and 7 days after.

Degree level or above (12 months or more): One month before and four months after.

Degree level or above (more 6 months, less 12 months): One month before and two months after.



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ANNEX

QUALIFICATION ELIGIBILITY: TIER 4 (GENERAL) STUDENT

You must be enrolled in a course of higher education that meets or exceeds the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 3. If you are a US Citizen enrolling as a student in college or university courses for 1st thru 3rd year college/university students in England, Wales or Northern Ireland or 1st thru 4th year college/university students in Scotland your course is above a level 3 on the NQF Framework. To view the equivalency chart please visit www.qca.org.uk/library/Assets/media/qca-06-2298-nqf-web.pdf

You should ensure that your provider is licensed with the UK Border Agency and listed on the new Register of Sponsors which is listed on the UK Border Agency web-site

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/pointsbasedsystem/registerofsponsorededucation

Your course provider (UK University/College or US program provider) is responsible for sending you an Official Offer Letter/Visa Letter stating you have been offered a place on one of their courses.

MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS: TIER 4 (GENERAL) STUDENT

You will need to demonstrate that you have sufficient funds to cover tuition and living expenses. The amount necessary will depend on where you plan to study and the length of your course. Please pay particular attention to the supporting documentary requirements detailed below.

(a) If the length of the course is 9 months or less:



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Inside London: Total course fees and £800 per month for the 9 months study period.

Outside London: Course fees and £600 per month for the 9 months study period.

(b) If you plan to study for more than 12 months:

Inside London: First year of course fees and £7,200 to cover maintenance for 1st year.

Outside London: First year of course fees and £5,400 to cover maintenance for 1st year.

WORKING, WORK PLACEMENT, WORK STUDY AND INTERNSHIPS UNDER TIER 4 (GENERAL) STUDENT VISA

As an adult student, you are allowed to work:

- Part-time during term-time (no more than 20 hours),
- full-time during vacations,
- Course related work placement (internship) as part of your studies other than part-time work during term time as long as it is no more than 50% of the time spent in the UK.

EXTENDING YOUR STAY WITH A TIER 4 (GENERAL) STUDENT VISA

You may only apply for an extension as a General Student to:

- Complete your course
- To complete extra exams
- Undertake further courses (eg to complete a degree).



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Glossary of Terms

Application Support Centre: 126 offices run by the Department of Homeland Security in the US. Applicants will make appointments as part of the on-line application process to visit these centres in order to have their Biometrics processed.

Approved course of study: Courses at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 3 and above. This includes 3 years courses offered by colleges and universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and 4 year courses offered by colleges and universities in Scotland.

Approved sponsor: The register of sponsors has the name, location and rating of the organisation. See also Register of Sponsors – Educational Providers.

Accredited Education Institution: Accreditation will provide an independent qualitative check on an institution in which the institution has demonstrated it is a genuine education provider rather than operating to facilitate the entry of bogus students to the United Kingdom.

Biometrics: An electronic photograph and scan of a persons fingerprints.

Biometrics appointment: The student will be asked to make an appointment at the end of their online visa application session. Students will be asked to visit one of the 125 Application Support Centres in the US.

Biometrics Confirmation Notice: After scheduling a Biometrics appointment the student will be instructed to print out the Biometrics Confirmation Notice. This notice will include a barcode and must be taken along to the Biometrics appointment.

Evidence of Funds: You must show evidence of enough money to pay your fees for the first year and your monthly living costs for up to 9 months (or the length of the course if shorter).

Maintenance: Proof that the student can support and accommodate herself/himself over the course of study. This will include anything that was not paid for before leaving the US (e.g. housing, tuition, and estimated living cost.)

NARIC: The National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (UK NARIC), is the National Agency providing the only official source of comparison information and advice on international education and training systems and overseas skills and qualifications.



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National Accreditation: National Accreditation is a validation process in which US Colleges and Universities take part; the process insures that their students receive a diploma or certificate which will be recognized across the US. Institutions of higher education are evaluated against established standards to ensure a high level of educational quality. It is typically accomplished through a peer-review process in which faculty from accredited institutions help to conduct evaluations of either new non-accredited institutions or accredited institutions seeking renewal.

PBS: Points Based System is for people 17 years or older coming to the UK for all or a portion of their college/university education. Implemented 31 March 2009 **Tier 4** of the UK Border Agency's system requires applicants to meet 40 points that include submitting a valid visa letter from a licensed sponsor (30 points) and passing the maintenance and funds test (10 points).

Port of Entry: An airport, seaport or physical border where a person would enter the UK (e.g. Heathrow Airport, the UK side of the Channel Tunnel or the land border in Ireland.)

Provider or Course Provider: The UK College or university where the student will be studying or the US College, university or organisation that is facilitating or offering the program in the UK.

Register of Sponsors- Educational Providers: This is the UK Border Agency's list of colleges, universities and program providers who have registered and passed their criteria. The register of sponsors has the name, location and rating of the organisation and the current register can be downloaded.
<http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/pointsbasedsystem/registerofsponsorededucation>

Self-assessment Tool: To determine your ability to submit a viable Tier 4 (General) Student visa application the UKBA encourages you to use the Self-assessment Tool which is located at www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk. The self-assessment tool is only a guide and does not guarantee that an application will be successful.

Short-term courses: Courses of study in the UK lasting 6 months or less.

Sponsor Licence: Institutions have to register with the UK Border Agency before they are allowed to sponsor international students under the student tier (tier 4) of Britain's points-based system.

Status: Terms under which you are permitted to remain in the UK.



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Student Visitor Stamp/Endorsement: Stamp/Endorsement which will be placed in a student's passport by a UKBA Immigration Officer after reviewing the necessary documents and determining the students eligibility to enter the UK as a Student Visitor.

Tier 4: This is the student Tier of the UKBA Immigration structure called the Points Based System.

Unconditional Acceptance: No outstanding barriers to a student undertaking a course.

US National: A US Citizen who holds a valid US passport.

Visa: A sticker placed into a passport or travel document which gives the owner permission to travel or study in the UK.

Visa Letter/Offer Letter: Official letter sent to student by a provider licensed or accredited with the UK Border Agency. This original document will include the student's name, nationality, information about the course provider, course information, course fees for length of course, fees paid thus far, and any documents the decision was based on. Visa Letters/Offer Letters will always be on letterhead.

Work (Paid or Unpaid): Employment, internships, or work study are all considered work. There are restrictions on paid and unpaid work eligibility. Those who wish to take part in an internship or work must apply for a Tier 4 Student Visa.