

The documents you need

You should check with your local British Mission who will be able to tell you what kind of evidence they require. British Missions are now beginning to see a growing number of applications that involve an element of fraud or forgery.

In the event that any visa applicant is found to have forged a document of any kind the application is always refused without exception, even if in all other respects the application is genuine.

As a student seeking entry clearance you will have to produce various genuine documents to show that you satisfy the Immigration Rules for students (see page 3), that is, evidence that you can pay for the course, educational certificates, and information from the institution where you intend to study.

Many applications for entry clearance are now decided on papers alone. It is therefore very important that you ensure you present the right documentation when you make your initial application. Failure to do this can result in entry clearance being refused. These same documents should be available to provide to the immigration officer on arrival even if you are a non-visa national entering the UK for a course of less than six months.

Applicants for UK visas valid for longer than six months in certain countries now require a certificate to show that they are free from infectious tuberculosis (TB).

The government announced, on 21 July 2005, its intention to implement the first phase of an overseas screening programme for TB for people applying to enter the UK for more than six months in high-risk countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand), in line with proposals made in its five-year strategy earlier this year. In the main phase of the programme, the UK government plans to roll out later in 2006 to those countries that represent the source of the highest potential numbers of migrants with infectious TB.

Further roll-out will depend on evaluation of these phases.

A further benefit of the programme is that successful applicants will benefit on arrival in the UK as they will not need to be referred to the Port Medical Inspector before being allowed to enter the country. To avoid delays, applicants must carry their certificate in their hand luggage to present to an immigration officer on arrival in the UK.

Make sure that you have the following documents and information before you apply for entry clearance:

A letter of acceptance on the course

This will be a letter from your institution confirming that you have been accepted for a course that is full-time as defined by the Immigration Rules for students, that is, it involves at least 15 hours' organised daytime study a week or is a full-time course leading to a degree.

The letter should state the course title, how long the course will last, and the date the course will finish. It should include dates of any graduation ceremony after the course finishes. It should indicate briefly the basic content of the course, how it links with previous or future courses, and any examinations you will take and any qualifications that will be earned. It may also include, if applicable, the name of the educational adviser or agent you used. It should stress that the institution is on the DFES' Register of Education and Training Providers.

If you have applied for your visa after your course has begun, the letter should state the latest date on which your institution will accept you for enrolment on the particular course.

Ability to follow the course

This Immigration Rule usually relates to English language proficiency for those embarking on a degree course or similar. It is therefore less relevant to a student who is to follow a beginner's English language course. Here, your letter may indicate which examination you are preparing for and what hours are appropriate.

However, if your course is advanced or specialised, the letter should also state what level of English is needed for it (giving minimum IELTS or other test marks, if appropriate) and confirmation that you have met the entry requirements for the course and have been assessed as academically able to follow it. If a pre-sessional English course or continuing language support are to be provided, the letter should explain this. If the letter does not include any of this information, contact your institution to obtain it.

Ability to pay for the course

The immigration authorities will want to be sure that you have enough money, without working in the UK, to meet all your costs during your period of study (although the rules allow full-time students to work part-time, they do not permit entry clearance officers to take into account any potential earnings from this activity). Depending on your circumstances, this could include evidence of government sponsorship, a letter from a sponsor in the UK confirming how much he or she is going to provide you with, together with evidence that he or she can do this, and/or your own bank statements. Ask your local British Mission how many months' bank statements they need to see. You should also provide a letter from your institution stating an estimate of the annual living costs for students in their area, including all likely expenses, the full cost of the course, what arrangements are acceptable for payment and confirmation if you have already paid fees or a deposit.

Accommodation

Although the Immigration Rules for students do not require unaccompanied students to show that accommodation has been arranged, you do need to show evidence that you can pay for it. Information about its cost and availability, therefore, is helpful. Your letter should state if accommodation is guaranteed, or if your institution will help you find somewhere to live.

If your dependants are coming with you to the UK, you will need to show that there will be adequate accommodation for them. If your place of study cannot confirm that family accommodation will be available, you are advised to travel to the UK alone and make arrangements for your family to join you when you have found somewhere to live.

Evidence that you intend to leave the UK when you finish your studies

Recent guidance from the Home Office indicates that degree-level students should not normally be refused on 'intentions to leave' grounds if their intention is to stay in the UK for work-permit employment (see page 8).

They may, however, be refused if they intend to stay in the UK for other reasons. Not everyone will be able to provide documents as evidence that they intend to leave the UK when they finish their studies. However, if any of the following apply in your case, you should provide evidence that:

- you own your own home
- you are leaving a husband/wife/civil partner or children at home while you study in the UK
- jobs requiring the qualification that you will be studying for are advertised in your home country
- an employer in your home country wants to employ you when you return with your qualification.

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How do I complete form VAF1?

More information available in the [First steps guidance notes - preparing for entry clearance.pdf](#).

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The interview

Although many applications are now considered on papers only, you may still be asked to attend an interview as part of your entry clearance application process. This generally happens only in cases where the entry clearance officer is unable to make a decision on the basis of the papers submitted. Only a small proportion of students are actually interviewed.

The interview process is designed to give you the opportunity to clarify for the entry clearance officer (ECO) certain parts of the application or to rectify any discrepancies. The ECO will need to be satisfied that your study plans are genuine and workable.

You have a right to use an interpreter, although this may weaken your position if your course requires a high level of English.

If the ECO is not satisfied that you meet all the requirements of the Rules you may still be required to provide further evidence.

In certain countries (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Uganda) applicants are required to provide fingerprints. Over the next five years everyone will be fingerprinted when they apply for a visa. This is an EU-wide requirement, although biometric implementation plans vary across the EU. Long-term visa applicants at some point in the future will be required to have Residence Permits, which will act as identification, and eventually their departure from the UK will be recorded to help target enforcement action against those who overstay.

Your level of English

If you are taking a course that requires English language skills, the entry clearance officer (ECO) will ask you to demonstrate your level of English at the interview (although a good IELTS score may be sufficient). If you do not wish to conduct the interview in English you should explain why, and give information about any language training you intend to take before or during your studies. Do not try to conduct the interview in English if it means you will not understand the questions asked or will be unable to express yourself fully.

You should prepare for such an interview carefully. In particular:

- be familiar with all your study plans; why you chose the particular institution and course; how the course will help your future career; how it links with any previous study or courses you have followed in your country and any future planned courses of study or employment plans. For example, you should say clearly what link any pre-session English study will have with any subsequent study
- know which examination(s) you are planning to take and what hours you will be studying
- if you are paying fees by instalments, how much they will be, and how often they are due
- be clear about the cost of living and the course and your finances; do you have enough money to complete the course - can you prove it?
- be as clear as you can about your likely future career in your country: what are you going to do when you return (unless you are a degree student hoping to stay on in the UK to work when you finish your studies, and are not sponsored by your own government or an international scholarship agency)?

You should answer all questions carefully and honestly. If you are not sure of an answer, say so. Do not invent a reply, which may be incorrect. Make sure you have understood the question before replying - ask for it to be repeated if you are not sure. When nervous, we can appear confused or reply in a misleading way, so try hard to remain calm and think carefully about your reply before giving it.

In some countries you may need a medical examination, and this may increase the amount of time your application takes to be processed (see page 10). Enquire at the British Mission in your country to check if this is the case. It is important to note that some long-term students may need to have a medical examination on entry.

If you are successful, check the vignette in your passport for the following:

- make sure it does not prohibit you from working; if it does, ask the entry clearance officer (ECO) to change it
- make sure it says you are a 'student', not a 'visitor'
- check its start date; you cannot use the entry clearance to travel to the UK before this date
- check its expiry date and make a note in your diary two months ahead of this date to remind you to seek advice if you want to apply for permission to stay in the UK beyond this date
- check whether or not it says that you must register with the police on your arrival in the UK; if it does, make a note to ask your institution how to do that as soon as you arrive in the UK.