

SAFETY FIRST

A PERSONAL SAFETY GUIDE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

ABOUT THE POLICE

ARRIVING IN THE UK

TAKING OUT INSURANCE

LOOKING AFTER YOUR BELONGINGS

FINDING PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION

SAFETY AT HOME

SAFETY ON THE STREETS

USING PUBLIC TRANSPORT

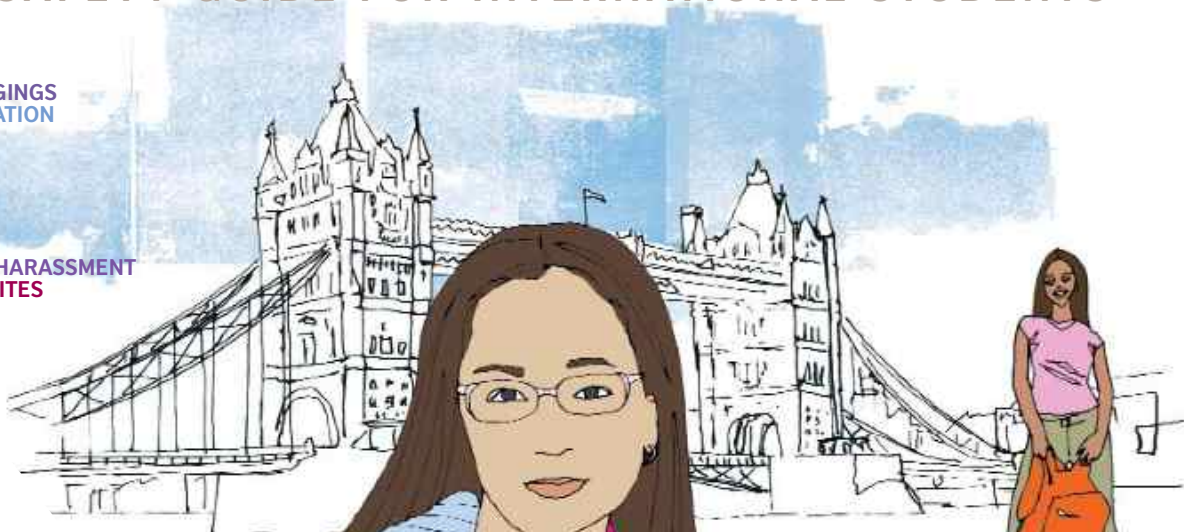
USING TAXIS

DRIVING IN THE UK

LAWS IN THE UK

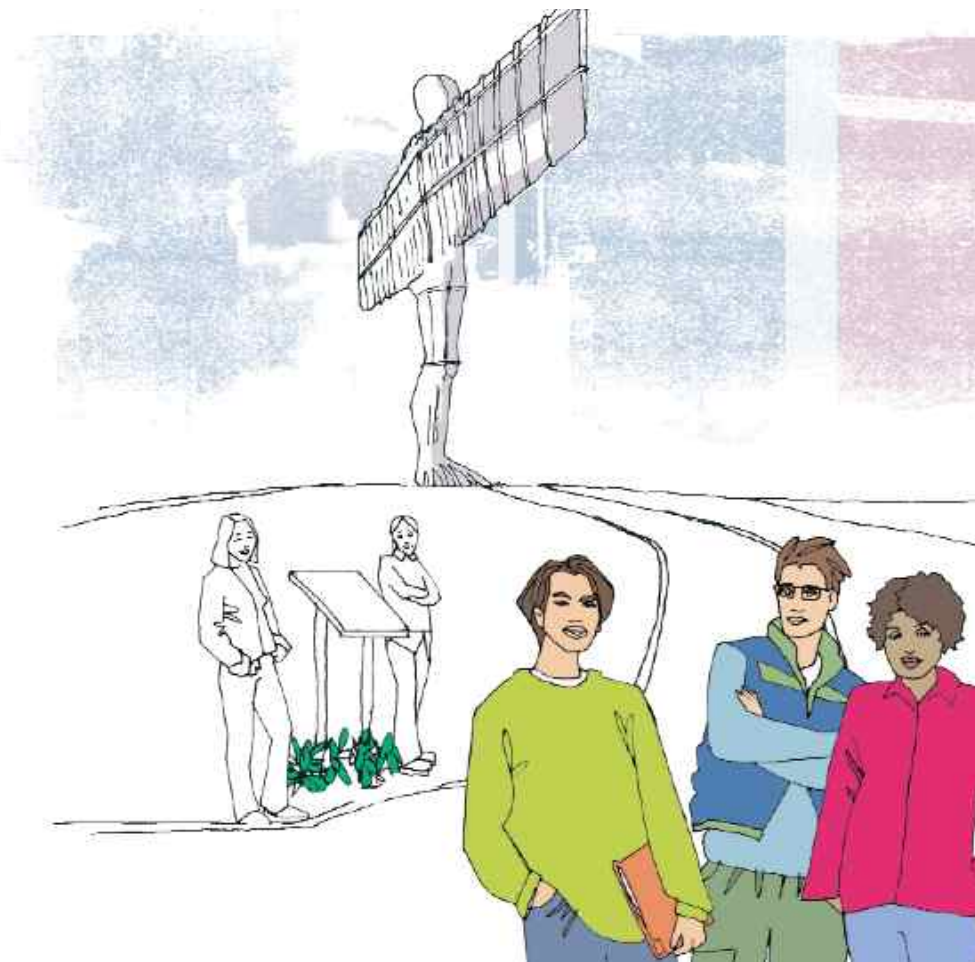
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

USEFUL HELPLINES AND WEBSITES



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INTRODUCTION

Whether you are coming to the United Kingdom (UK) for a short training course or to attend a longer study programme, we want your stay here to be a valuable and enjoyable educational and cultural experience.

For many of you this will be your first time living away from home in an unfamiliar country.

This guide is designed to help you prepare for your stay here and give you practical advice about living and studying in the UK. It highlights some of the safety and security issues you need to be aware of and lists organisations to contact if you do need help.

By international standards, the UK is a safe country, with low levels of violence and street crime. A recent survey by the British Council showed that the vast majority of those students who responded have not been the victims of crime while in the UK.

Much of the advice is common sense, but it can make a real difference. You can make yourself safer and protect your family, accommodation and belongings by following some of these simple suggestions.

The British Council, the Home Office and the police are working together to make all students

less vulnerable to crime while they are studying at school, college or university.

Staff at your institution are there to help you take care of yourself and settle happily into your local community. They, or local community police officers, usually give talks about personal safety and give practical advice to help you get around as safely as possible.

Taking the personal safety advice in this guide (and insuring your belongings when you arrive) should be one of your first priorities.

Do remember that the vast majority of international students enjoy a positive and rewarding experience during their stay in the UK; the suggestions that follow are intended to advise, not to alarm.

We hope that you find this guide helpful.

Helen Clews
British Council



ABOUT THE POLICE

The police in the UK are friendly and helpful, have a duty to protect everyone and can always be safely approached. They are committed to promoting crime prevention and work closely with educational institutions, their staff and students to promote and reinforce student safety messages.

REGISTERING YOUR STAY

Some international students are required to register their stay with the police within seven days of their arrival. The stamp in your passport will tell you whether or not you should register. Many universities and institutions organise registration sessions on campus. If yours doesn't and you need to register, you should take your passport, two photographs and £34 registration fee to a local police station or, if you are studying in London, the Overseas Visitors' Records Office on 020 7230 1208.

During your stay if you do have anything stolen, are assaulted, followed or threatened, you can contact the police who will always encourage you to report the incident. Do not worry about language difficulties as the police will find someone, free of charge, who speaks your language. You can tell your tutor, welfare officer, your host family, security on campus, or someone

you can trust that they can contact the police for you or you can even do it anonymously.

Your local police station can also provide helpful advice about crime prevention and a home security assessment, if required. They can also provide a certificate if you need to make an insurance claim for a theft.

IN AN EMERGENCY

In an emergency where there is a danger to life or a crime is in progress you can contact the police, fire brigade or ambulance by dialling 999 from any telephone. This call is free of charge but should be used only in an emergency.

HOW TO REPORT A CRIME

To report a non-emergency minor crime, call your local police station – you can find their number in the telephone directory. Alternatively you can ask someone you know and trust to make the call for you.

The charity Crimestoppers runs the 0800 555 111 number, which allows people to telephone anonymously with information about criminals or crimes. The information is then passed on to the police. Just tell them what you know, not who you are.



ARRIVING IN THE UK

In the excitement of arriving in a new country, it can be easy to become distracted and misplace things, especially as you get on and off planes, trains and coaches. Here is some practical advice to help you when you first arrive in the UK.

- Take special care of your passport, travel documents and tickets and keep them with you in a safe place. Before you travel, take a photocopy of all the pages of your passport that show your details (name, photograph, passport number and its date and place of issue) and all the pages that have any entry clearances or immigration stamps on them and pack this separately from your passport. If you do lose your passport contact the police and your Embassy immediately and give them your passport details.
- We strongly advise against carrying large amounts of cash with you. Just bring enough to cover your immediate needs (about £250). Bring a credit card, if you have one, to pay for things like rail tickets and hotel bills. If possible, your cash should include some coins and some small bank notes (£5 or £10), so that you can use public telephones and ticket machines.
- Carry cash, credit cards and travellers' cheques in a safe place, such as an inside pocket, a money belt or a zipped bag. Make a note of the serial numbers of your travellers' cheques and pack this separately from the cheques themselves. Keep your travellers' cheques separate from your passport. If you lose your travellers' cheques or credit card, report the loss to the police and the issuing organisation immediately.
- Keep the telephone number of your college or university handy, in case you need to call for advice or tell them about a change in your plans.
- Label your luggage clearly so that it can be forwarded to you if it gets separated from you during the journey. If you do lose your luggage, report the loss immediately to officials of the airline or shipping line. At airports or seaports, check the 'lost property office' to see whether it has been handed in there.
- If you need to leave your luggage somewhere while you change money or make telephone calls, find an official 'left luggage office' (available at airports and at major rail and coach stations). For a small fee, you will be able to leave your luggage in a supervised area. The attendant will give you a receipt so that you can collect your items later.

- Always use a licensed taxi. You can check whether the taxi is licensed by looking at the back of it to ensure an official licence plate is attached before you get in. You should never agree to travel in an unlicensed taxi with an unlicensed driver.
- From Heathrow Airport, you can safely travel in one of the famous 'black cabs'. At other airports the information desk will give you the names of reputable companies who are permitted to work there. Never agree to travel with someone who approaches you inside the terminal building unless you have made a specific arrangement to be met by a 'minicab' company.



TAKING OUT INSURANCE

It is essential that you take out insurance when you arrive in the UK to insure your belongings against theft and accidental damage. You can find insurance information on most college and university campuses or you can consult your students' union or bank.

For general advice on insurance and a full list of insurance brokers contact The British Insurance Brokers' Association at www.biba.org.uk



LOOKING AFTER YOUR BELONGINGS



- When moving into new accommodation, don't leave luggage or belongings outside or in the open trunk/boot of a car or taxi.
- Use an ultraviolet pen to mark your valuables with your name and student ID number (see your students' union office for details). This will enable the police to return them if they are stolen and recovered.
- Ask your college if they provide safe storage or consider purchasing a small personal safe to keep your passport, travellers' cheques, wallet/purse and other valuables locked away.
- Make sure your television, video and other valuables can't be seen through a window and never leave cash or credit cards lying around.
- If you go away on holiday, try to leave your valuables in storage (many educational institutions have a secure storage room) or with a trusted friend.
- If you have a bicycle, always lock it up by its frame and wheel to a fixed object when you're not using it. Mark it with your postcode so the police can return it if it is stolen and recovered.
- Try not to use a computer case when carrying a laptop; use a less obvious bag to carry it in and think before using it – and displaying other expensive items such as watches and jewellery – in busy public places.
- Register your mobile phone free of charge with Immobilise Phone Crime (www.imbolise.com). If it is stolen, call 08701 123 123. You will need to have your IMEI number (15 digit serial number) when reporting a stolen mobile phone – this can be found by dialling *#06# on most mobiles or by looking behind the phone battery. You should keep a note of your IMEI number in a safe place in case it is required. Never leave your mobile phone unattended.

FINDING PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION

It is important for you to have suitable, safe accommodation while you are studying in the UK. Start making arrangements as soon as you have been accepted on your course – this is especially important if you are planning to bring your family with you.

Make sure you arrange some form of accommodation before you arrive in the UK, even if it is only temporary. Contact the student officer at your Embassy or High Commission before you leave your home country – they may be able to give you information.

You can get information about accommodation owned by private landlords from the accommodation office at your institution. Contact them as soon as you are accepted on your course to find out what is available.

Here are some tips to help you find safe, private accommodation:

- Ask the accommodation office at your institution, the welfare office or the students' union for advice and help. They may have lists of local accommodation to rent and may also have inspected it to check it is suitable. They may be able to help if you have any problems.
- Check whether the accommodation you are going to see is in a safe area before you go. To find out about crime statistics in the area you are planning to live, look at: www.crimestatistics.org.uk
- If possible, take someone with you when viewing accommodation. If you are alone, leave the address you are going to and your expected time of return with a friend or colleague.

- Find out exactly who might have access to the accommodation apart from yourself.
- Be businesslike in your dealings with prospective landlords or landladies.
- If you feel uncomfortable with anyone who is showing you accommodation, mention that friends know where you are and are expecting your return at a certain time.

You can get more useful advice about finding student accommodation in the UK at: www.ukcosa.org.uk



SAFETY AT HOME

- Lock all outside doors and deadlock windows when you are at home and consider using or purchasing a safety chain or spy hole for your front door.
- If you are female and live in a flat with a door-entry system do not put 'Miss', 'Mrs', or 'Ms' in front of your name; just use your family name. If in doubt about a visitor, do not let him or her in.
- If you live in a flat or a house with an outside light and/or a burglar alarm, make sure you use them. If the alarm can be set to cover zoned areas, set the alarm downstairs when you go to bed.
- Every home should have at least one smoke alarm, preferably two, which should be tested regularly. These can be bought very cheaply from hardware shops and other high street retailers.
- If you have a telephone-answering machine, don't record a message saying: 'I am not available', as this reveals to the caller that you are a single occupant. It is better to say: 'No one is available to take your call.'
- If you ever receive obscene or threatening telephone calls or notes tell a member of staff at your institution or the police.
- If you live in a shared house, don't assume there is someone else in who will make it secure when you go out. Make sure you leave the house secure at all times.
- If you are going away, tell someone you trust where you are going and when you will be back.
- Don't leave spare keys outside or in a garage or shed. Keep house and car keys separate and out of sight in the house.
- Leave keys in a safe place where you can find them easily in case you need to leave in a hurry, but don't keep them near doors or windows.
- If you are leaving the house empty, ask a friend to open and close your curtains/blinds in the mornings and evenings. Use a time-switch for your lights and radios to make it look as if there is someone in; these can be bought from hardware shops and other high street retailers.
- If you do see signs of a break-in – smashed windows or open doors – don't go in. Go to a friend or neighbour's house and call the police. Do not touch anything when you do go back in as you could destroy valuable evidence.

ELECTRIC AND GAS FIRES, HEATERS AND COOKERS

- If you have cookers, fires and/or heaters in your accommodation, make sure that they are checked every year by a professional person. If you think any gas fires, heaters or cookers are unsafe, get a carbon monoxide detector, which you can buy in hardware shops and some petrol stations.

- If you live in rented accommodation, ask your landlord or landlady to have cookers, fires and heaters checked. They are required by law to show you the most recent safety certificate.
- Whenever you go out, turn off gas and electrical appliances, such as the cooker, television and iron (but not refrigerator).

HOW TO AVOID BEING TRAPPED BY FIRE WHEN INSIDE BUILDINGS

- Know the location of and, where appropriate, how to use fire exits, fire-assembly points, fire-fighting equipment and first-aid facilities.
- Know the procedures for emergency evacuation and follow them as necessary.

HOW TO REPORT A GAS LEAK

If you smell gas anywhere, either in the house or in the street, call the freephone gas service emergency number on 0800 111 999. If it is in your own house and it is safe to do so, turn off the gas supply and open the windows and doors.



SAFETY ON THE STREETS

Generally speaking, it is safe to walk on the streets in the UK, although you should avoid walking alone at night and use your common sense wherever you are.

- When you first move into your accommodation, find suitable and safe routes to petrol stations, shops and telephone stands. Try to find routes that are well lit and busy.
- Walk on the pavement, facing oncoming traffic. When crossing the road, remember that vehicles drive on the left in the UK so they will be coming towards you from the right.
- If you are returning home late at night, walk in a group or use public transport. Avoid putting yourself at risk by taking shortcuts, for example, through dark alleyways or parks.
- Don't carry large amounts of cash with you when you are out.
- Always carry enough change and/or a telephone or telephone card to make a telephone call, or to get a taxi, should you need one.
- Be alert and brief when using a mobile phone and try to conceal it.
- When using a public telephone stand, face outwards, so that you can see what's going on around you.
- If you feel you are being followed, cross the street (more than once if necessary), and if you are still unhappy move as quickly as possible to a public area, such as a restaurant or bar, and telephone for help. It is not necessarily the best idea to use the first telephone that you see if it is in an isolated spot.
- Don't accept drinks from strangers or leave your drink unattended in public places as 'spiking' drinks with drugs or alcohol is on the increase.
- Carry a personal attack alarm in your hand when walking at night in case you need it quickly.
- Avoid confrontation – it's better and safer to walk away if you are being provoked or hassled.
- Be aware of others around you at cash point machines and try not to use them at night or in poorly lit areas. If you must use a machine, go with a friend and leave as soon as you have your money.

- Always memorise your PIN (personal identification number) to access your money from a cash machine. Never write down your PIN or give it to anyone else.
- Have your keys ready well before you reach the door of your car or house.
- Carry your bag close to you with the clasp facing inwards or strap it over your shoulder. If someone grabs your bag, let it go. Your safety is more important.
- If you live in halls of residence, make sure no strangers follow you when you walk through the main entrance.



USING PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Public transport in the UK is reliable, relatively inexpensive and convenient to use.

Here are some tips on using it safely:

- If travelling by bus, try not to wait alone at bus stops. When on the bus, sit downstairs (if on a double-decker) where the driver and other passengers can see you. Arrange for others to meet you at the bus stop if you are returning late and have a long way to walk home.
- If you can, take a taxi rather than walk the streets with a road map and your luggage.
- If you travel by train or Underground (tube), don't sit in an empty carriage. Try to sit near groups of people in a well-lit area.
- If you travel by train, store your luggage as close to your seat as possible, or where you can easily see it. If you use a luggage rack, check your belongings regularly, especially when a train stops at a station.

- If travelling a long way by train, make sure someone knows which train you are travelling on and when you are due to arrive.
- Check the time of the last train, bus, tube or tram home to avoid being stranded at night.
- If you are lost, or in need of assistance when travelling by train, find a member of staff or telephone the British Transport Police on freephone 0800 40 50 40.
- Do not open the doors until your transport home has completely stopped.
- Try to avoid walking alone after getting off a train, bus, tube or tram. If you can, walk close to a group of people or arrange for someone to meet you.
- Never walk across or touch railway lines – it is very dangerous and you could be badly injured or even killed.
- To remain safe and alert don't listen to personal stereos or have long conversations on mobile phones while you are walking.



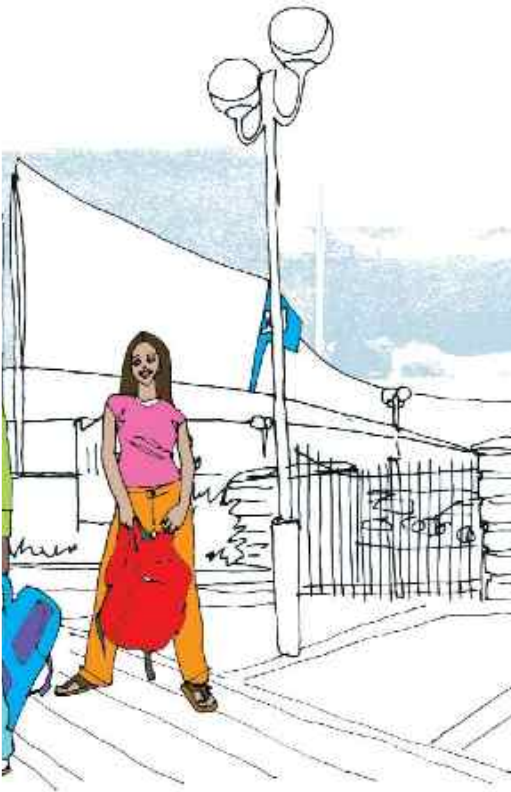
USING TAXIS

There will probably be times when you need to take a taxi during your stay in the UK, for instance, when you first arrive here or after a night out. If you don't feel safe walking home, use a taxi.

However, you do need to be aware of some basic safety guidelines about using them. Here are some helpful tips:

- If you need to use a taxi, ask your educational institution to recommend a taxi company and keep the telephone number handy – never use an unlicensed company.
- Check the back of the taxi to ensure there is an official licence plate attached before you get in.
- Be aware that some minicabs that stop in the street may be cheaper but are not licensed, and are therefore not as safe as taxis or minicabs that you arrange by telephone.
- Agree the fare with the driver before you get into the taxi in order to avoid misunderstandings when you get to your destination.

- Sit in the back of a taxi and directly behind the driver, whenever possible.
- It is quite acceptable to chat with the driver, but do not give away any personal information.
- Have your cash ready and leave the cab before you pay the driver. Some educational institutions have linked up with a taxi firm so, even if you don't have cash, you can pay the driver later if you give your student card details to the driver. Ask your students' union for details.
- If you want, you can ask your taxi driver to wait until you have entered your house safely before he or she drives away.



DRIVING IN THE UK

As an international student you must make sure you fulfil the legal requirements and be aware of the correct procedures before you drive in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

You must have a licence that allows you to drive in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales). There are different arrangements in Northern Ireland. GB licences are issued by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). If you have a driving licence that was issued in your home country, you must find out if you can use it to drive in Great Britain and how long it is valid for.

A guidance note (*Driving in England, Scotland and Wales: a guide for international students*), can be found at www.ukcosa.org.uk/images/driving.pdf

To drive a car or ride a motorcycle in the UK you must be 17 years old. The Highway Code is a government publication that provides a summary of UK traffic law and has pictures of all the road signs in use in the UK (many of which are also used throughout the European Union). You can buy this book at most good bookshops or read it online at www.highwaycode.gov.uk

There are several ways that driving in the UK differs from driving in other countries. The British drive on the left hand side of the road and overtake on the right. Seat belts must be worn at all times. It is illegal to use a hand-held mobile phone or send or read text messages while driving. You must not drive while under the influence of alcohol or drugs and you must observe all speed limits. Remember, pedestrians have the right of way when on pedestrian crossings.

Here are a few more tips to help you drive safely in the UK.

- If you are going on a long journey, plan your route using main roads, and telephone ahead to let someone know roughly when to expect you.

- Before you set off, check your tyres and fuel, and oil levels. Tyre weld is useful in case of a flat tyre in a remote area as it will mend a punctured tyre for long enough for you to reach a garage.
- Always carry a good torch and check the batteries regularly.
- Handbags or briefcases are safer placed on the floor or behind seats rather than on the passenger seat. Don't leave valuables in the car; if you have to, lock them in the boot/trunk so they are out of sight.
- If you're travelling in a car alone lock all the doors and keep the windows closed while you are driving.



LAWS IN THE UK

The laws in the UK may be different from those in your home country. This especially applies to the use of tobacco, alcohol and self-defence sprays.

- You must not carry drugs with you of any kind (unless prescribed by a doctor), or use any illegal drugs, including cannabis, ecstasy, LSD or amphetamines.
- It is illegal to carry any sort of weapon including knives, self-defence cs gas sprays, guns or stun guns.
- You must be 16 and over to buy tobacco.
- You must be 18 and over to buy alcohol.
- Never buy property that you think might be stolen, no matter how tempting the bargain.
- It is an offence to falsely report the theft of property.

You can find an essential guide to the law in the UK at www.bbc.co.uk/crime/law

If you need legal assistance, there are a number of organisations that can help you:

- Community Legal Service Direct offers access to free legal information and advice. Find out more at www.clsdirect.org.uk or telephone 0845 345 4345.
- You can also contact the Citizens Advice Bureaux at www.citizensadvice.org.uk They provide free, confidential and independent advice in bureaux, colleges, and other institutions across the UK. Advice is available face-to-face and by telephone on issues such as housing, legal difficulties and discrimination.



RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

The population of the UK is increasingly diverse and a great many religions and ethnic groups are represented. Britain is a tolerant society that believes in respecting the rights of minority groups.

This belief is supported by law: the Race Relations Act is one of the most comprehensive laws against racial discrimination in the world and works towards the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunity between people of different racial groups.

If you are subjected to any form of racial discrimination or harassment, report it to your institution. They will have a formal procedure to

assist individuals who feel they have been discriminated against. You can also report it to the local branch of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). The CRE will provide information and advice to anyone who thinks they have suffered racial discrimination or harassment.

You can contact the Commission for Racial Equality on 020 7939 0000 or find out more from their website at www.cre.gov.uk



USEFUL HELPLINES AND WEBSITES

The following helplines and websites offer sensitive and impartial information and support by telephone and on the internet. Information and advice in most cases is free and confidential. Remember, these organisations are there to help you, so do not hesitate to contact them if you need assistance.

BBC

Lots of useful safety advice and tips regarding crime prevention and self-defence.

www.bbc.co.uk/crime/prevention

British Insurance Brokers Association

Information about insurance and insurance providers in the UK.

www.biba.org.uk

British Transport Police

Provides a policing service on the railways, London Underground, the Docklands Light Railway, the Midland Metro tram system and the Croydon Tramlink.

www.btp.police.uk

Childalert.co.uk

Comprehensive advice and personal safety guidance for children.

www.childalert.co.uk

Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB)

The CAB service helps people resolve their money, legal and other problems by providing information and advice.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Advice guide (CAB)

www.adviceguide.org.uk

Commission for Racial Equality

Offers support and advice in cases of racial discrimination or harassment.

www.cre.gov.uk

Telephone 020 7939 0000

Community Legal Service Direct

Access to free legal information and advice.

www.clsdirect.org.uk

Telephone 0845 345 4345

Crimereduction.gov.uk

Useful information and resources about crime prevention.

www.crimereduction.gov.uk

Crimestoppers

The charity Crimestoppers runs the 0800 555 111 number, which allows people to telephone anonymously with information about criminals or crimes. The information is then passed on to the police. Just tell them what you know, not who you are.

www.crimestoppers-uk.org

Department for Transport

Advice on traffic law in the UK.

www.highwaycode.gov.uk

Drinkline

Advice on sensible drinking and alcohol misuse.

Telephone 0800 917 8282

Home Office

Practical advice on protecting yourself against student crime.

www.good2bsecure.gov.uk

Immobilise Phone Crime

To register your mobile phone and what to do if it is stolen.

www.immobilise.com

Telephone 08701 123 123

Information about crime statistics in different regions of the UK

www.crimestatistics.org.uk

National Domestic Violence Helpline

Free telephone support for women experiencing domestic violence.

Telephone 0908 2000 247

National Drugs Helpline

A 24-hour, seven days a week free confidential service offering advice and information to individuals concerned about drugs.

www.ndh.org.uk

Telephone 0800 77 66 00

National Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

Information, support and referral service for lesbians and gay men.

Telephone 020 7837 7324

National Union of Students

The website for the National Union of Students (NUS).

www.nusonline.co.uk

NHS Direct

NHS Direct offers confidential health advice and information, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Telephone 0845 4647

Rape Crisis Federation for Wales and England

Help for women who have suffered rape, sexual abuse, attack or harassment.

www.rapecrisis.co.uk

Samaritans (24 hours)

The Samaritans provide confidential support to individuals in emotional distress.

www.samaritans.org.uk

Telephone 0845 790 9090

Stonewall

A political lobbying group working towards the civil, political, economic social and cultural rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

www.stonewall.org.uk

Telephone 020 7881 9440

Student Accommodation

A directory of student accommodation and associated links.

www.studentaccommodation.org

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

A national charity offering advice on how to be safe.

www.suzylamplugh.org

Telephone 020 8876 0305

Terrence Higgins Trust

The Terrence Higgins Trust delivers health promotion campaigns, national and local services to people with or affected by AIDS.

www.tht.org.uk

Telephone 0845 1221 200

UKCOSA – The Council for International Education

Offers advice and comprehensive guidance notes on aspects of studying in the UK for international students.

www.ukcosa.org.uk

ukstudentlife.com

Information about keeping yourself and your belongings safe.

www.ukstudentlife.com/Personal/Safety.htm

Victim Support

An independent charity that helps people cope with the effects of crime. They provide free and confidential support and information to help individuals deal with their experiences.

www.victimsupport.org.uk

Supportline: 0845 30 30 900

Women's Aid

Offers support and a place of safety to abused women and children.

www.womensaid.org.uk

Telephone 0808 2000 247

www.britishcouncil.org



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The United Kingdom's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. We are registered in England as a charity.