



Ready for take off? Student Visas for the UK – new requirements

IMPORTANT

NEW Student Visa requirements for students planning to study in the UK

To get permission to come to the UK to study, students now need to pass a points based assessment. The new points based system (PBS) Tier 4 aims to make the application process simpler and clearer to understand.

This is an overview for students planning to enrol in UK universities and other education institutions in **September 2009**, highlighting key new requirements they should be aware of.

The information in this document is correct at the time of writing, but for the latest information, please check <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk>.

The new system will affect all students planning to study in the UK this year who do not hold British Citizenship or EU passports. Those holding British National Overseas (BNO) passports are affected.

Parents and students need to fully understand the new system so they can make early preparations to ensure visas can be issued before the start of term in September. Students need to be ready to apply for their visas as soon as possible after accepting offers and receiving visa letters.

The new system: how many points are needed to qualify?

Students need **40** points to qualify for a student visa and these are earned by:

- Supplying an original, valid Visa letter from their sponsor (the institution they will be joining) - 30 points
- Fulfilling the financial maintenance requirements - 10 points

See <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk> for more details.

What you should be mindful of when applying under the new system

(i) Fulfilling the Financial Maintenance requirements

- Students should take early action to ensure they meet the financial maintenance requirements for a Visa, at least one month before they intend to lodge their application.
- For courses of more than 9 months, the amount in the account must cover fees for the first year of the course plus living expenses of £7,200 (in London) or £5,400 (outside London). This has been put in place to help students avoid any financial difficulties that might affect their ability to complete their studies. They may provide written evidence from the institution that tuition and accommodation fees have been paid in advance, which would be deducted from the total required.

- For students who have completed a course of study in the UK that was at least six months long in the past four months (i.e. International students already studying in the UK prior to moving to a new institution in September), they will only need to show in their account sufficient funds to cover fees for the first year of the course plus living expenses for two months or £1,600 (in London) and £1,200 (outside London).
- Adult students (those 18 and over) must show they have held the maintenance money in cash in a bank account in their **own** name (or joint name with parents) for at least **28 days continuously prior to their visa appointment**. Money held in a parent's bank account or proof of parental income or savings is **not acceptable**. For child students, parental bank accounts may be used.
- The student may alternatively show proof they have a loan from a regulated institution. If students are eligible for an Overseas Education Allowance, they need a letter from the Treasury or employing government department stating that an overseas education allowance has been awarded. The letter must state the amount of the award each year, the end date and evidence in the student's name of the remainder of funds required.
- Please read carefully the guidance on maintenance requirements at <http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/howtoapply/infos/inf29pbsstudent>

(ii) Supplying an original, valid Visa letter from the sponsor

- Students need to obtain a “visa letter” from the education institution where they intend to study. This institution **must** be on the “register of sponsors” kept by the British Government, at <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/pointsbasedsystem/registerofsponsorededucation>. This will give peace of mind to students by ensuring that the courses that applicants want to join are run by bona fide institutions approved by the British Government.
- International Baccalaureate Diploma students will normally receive notification from UCAS that a conditional offer from their Firm acceptance choice has been accepted or rejected within two weeks of receiving their IB results in early July. Students will be sent an original Visa letter confirming that offer. PDFs and faxed copies **will not** be accepted. If they have not heard from the university within two weeks of receiving results they are advised to contact them directly.
- IB Diploma and Hong Kong A-level students who have not fully met their Firm and/or Insurance offers should contact their chosen institution **as soon as possible**, after receiving their results, requesting early confirmation of the offer. However, some students may be asked to wait until after UK A-levels are published on August 20 for a decision, or to enter Clearing. They will not be able to apply for a visa before this point, but should ensure they have taken steps to meet the financial maintenance requirements.
- Those taking UK A-levels will need to wait for offer confirmation and visa letters after results are published.
- Year 11 students planning to study in the UK after completing GCSEs can apply for their visas with visa letters detailing conditional offers. They do not need to wait for their GCSE results but should apply for their visas as soon as possible. Once an unconditional offer has been received this should immediately be supplied to the Visa Application Centre at the British Consulate General in Hong Kong for a final decision
- International students already studying in the UK prior to moving to a new institution in September will normally hold valid visas that expire at the end of October. These students are advised to seek an extension of stay in the UK rather than Hong Kong before October 31st. This will ensure they can arrive at the new institution for the start of term, without having to wait for A-level results and allow a month for the visa application process in Hong Kong before travelling. This will cost £357, compared with £145 for visas issued in Hong Kong. BNO passport holders will also need to pay the visa fee in the UK.
- Students should ensure that the Visa Letter from their sponsor meets the specific requirements and contains all necessary details. Specific Visa Letter requirements can be found at: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/employers/points/whatisthepointsbasedsystem/visaletterforadultstudent>

What else is required to support the Student Visa application?

In addition to the point requirements, the following are required to support the application:

- A signed printout of your on-line application form (VAF9 PBS)
- A current passport or travel document
- Two recent passport – sized colour photographs
- Proof of any qualifications you used to be accepted onto the course
- Evidence of your Hong Kong/Macau immigration status
- The application fee
- Any other supporting documents required by PBS Tier 4.
- Biometric data (digital photo and fingerprints) will be collected at the Visa Office.

Full details of the above requirements can be found at www.ukvisas.gov.uk

Parents and students should read **all** information very carefully to ensure they **fully** comply before submitting the application.

Original documents are required – faxes, photocopies, internet/email printouts do not meet the PBS Tier 4 requirements. The only exception is electronic bank statements which have been stamped on each page by the bank.

How do students lodge an application?

Once students have met the requirements, they should apply for their visas **as soon as possible** in July to avoid possible delays during the peak visa application period in August.

Applications must be submitted on-line, where appointments to visit the Visa Section of the British Consulate General in Hong Kong must also be made.

How long does it take?

Applicants should allow up to **one month** from when they **book** an appointment to lodge documents for the Visa to be approved and issued, and 15 working days after submitting their documents

- **For students already studying in the UK:**

We strongly advise students already studying in the UK who hold valid visas due to expire at the end of October to renew their visas in the UK after the start of the new academic year. This is particularly important for students receiving confirmed offers in late August after UK A-level results are published and during the UCAS Clearing period. It will ensure that they can arrive at their new institution at the start of term by avoiding the wait of at least one month to obtain the visa in Hong Kong.

These students must be reminded that it is essential they renew the visa before end of October. If they wait until they return to Hong Kong in December their applications will be rejected and they will be unable to return to the UK to continue their studies.

Useful web links

UKBA website

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk>

UKBA info sheet for students

<http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/howtoapply/infos/inf29pbsstudent>

UKBA video on new student visa application process

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keBOZ9rFuuk>

Register of Sponsors

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/pointsbasedsystem/registerofsponsorseducation>

Visa Offer Letter from Sponsor - Specific Requirements

- For adult students

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/employers/points/whatisthepointsbasedsystem/visaletterforadultstudent>

- For child students

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/employers/points/whatisthepointsbasedsystem/visaletterforchildstudent>

To book an appointment

<http://ukinhongkong.fco.gov.uk/en/visas/>

Visa Online Application Form

<http://www.visa4uk.fco.gov.uk/>

Document checklist

<http://ukinhongkong.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/14996412/student.pdf>

UKCISA briefing note for students applying for a visa overseas 'Making a student immigration application in your home country

http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/student/info_sheets/applying_home_country.php

For information on Clearing

<http://www.ucas.com/students/afteryouapply/clearing>

Other immigration-related information on the British Council website

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/hongkong-educationuk-immigration-and-work.htm>

The British Council has taken steps to ensure the accuracy of the above information at the time of publication on 22 May 2009. This is advice only and does not substitute any requirements and information detailed by the UK Border Agency.