

SU ADVICE



QUEEN'S  
STUDENTS'  
UNION



# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GUIDE

Going to University is a very exciting and often a very scary time in students' lives.

Finding your feet once you've arrived can be difficult especially if you have moved to an entirely new country to study.

If you're an international student and are experiencing homesickness, don't worry, you are not alone and this is completely normal! In fact, many home students will experience this too.

We hope that our International Student Guide will give you some useful information to help you settle in.

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# SETTLING IN

Adapting to life in a different country can be difficult, you may experience a period of transition, often known as 'culture shock'. Don't worry - you are not alone in this!

Here is some information about what to expect and some ideas to help you adapt to life in Belfast.

# CULTURE SHOCK

## What contributes to culture shock?

- **Social roles:** such as the way in which people interact with one another
- **Rules of behaviour:** for example time keeping and queuing
- **Academic expectations:** different methods of teaching and learning
- **Language:** you may encounter many different accents, some stronger than others
- **Climate:** the weather can be unpredictable and is often a lot colder than most places
- **Food:** you may find local food very different to your home country and it may seem quite bland in comparison

## What are the effects of culture shock?

You may experience health problems such as headaches or stomach aches. You may also find it difficult to sleep and concentrate and to focus on your studies. Some people also find that they become more irritable or emotional. All of these effects can increase your anxiety.

## How to deal with culture shock?

- Remember that culture shock is a normal reaction that many experience
- Keep in contact with friends and family at home
- Have familiar things around you such as photographs and other sentimental objects
- Find a supplier of familiar food if you can
- Keep healthy by exercising regularly, eating well and getting into a healthy sleep routine
- Work at making friends with other students, both from your own culture and others
- Talk to other international students, they will understand how you are feeling

- Take advantage of the help and support that is on offer at the University: from the Student Wellbeing Service in One Elmwood, the University Chaplaincy, your Personal Tutor and the Students' Union
- Find out about local faith communities if this is important to you
- Join one of the 220+ SU Clubs & Societies that may interest you, help you to meet new people, and make friends

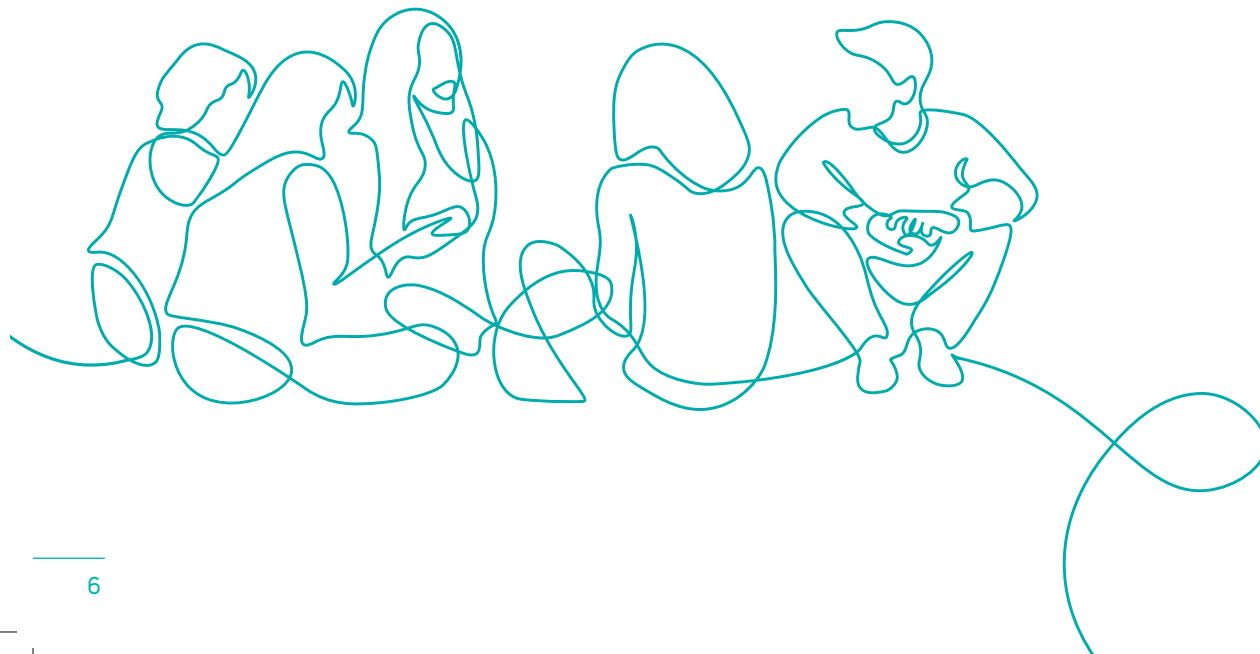
### A taste of home

If you're looking for a taste of home and struggling to find the right ingredients, you may want to look at some international supermarkets. The following are within walking distance of the University:

- Tipaza, 143 Lisburn Road
- Asia Supermarket Belfast, 40 Ormeau Embankment
- Bangla Bazar, 175 Ormeau Road

Or, if you're looking for more localised foods, Google the following large supermarket chains and you will find one close by:

- Tesco
- Lidl
- Sainsburys
- Asda



## MAKING FRIENDS

Coming to a new place not knowing people or maybe not knowing anyone at all can at first be a lonely experience. Some of us find speaking to new people easier than others. Finding someone else or a group of people with a similar interest can make breaking the ice a little easier. We over 220 Clubs &

Societies that you can join to make the most of your University experience whilst engaging in something you love.

From sports to academic topics to more niche activities, there's something for everyone. You can find information about these on our website.

## WHAT TO DO IF NOTHING WORKS

If you're well into your first year and still feeling homesick and unsettled, you may be thinking you've made a mistake in coming to university. Don't rush into any decisions about leaving, as things could still improve, but do talk it over with SU Advice, Wellbeing team or your Personal Tutor. It may help to speak to someone back home about this too.

They'll help you to clarify your feelings and get things in perspective, but they shouldn't put pressure on you to stay at university if it's really not the right place for you. For a few students, it can be right to leave and take another direction.

If you are struggling with homesickness and find that it is starting to affect your mental health, you can contact the Counselling and Wellbeing Service in One Elmwood. You can contact them by visiting them in person for the Wellbeing drop-in that takes place Monday-Friday between 11am - 3pm. You can also contact them using the following contact information:

**Telephone:** 028 9097 2893

**Email:** [studentwellbeing@qub.ac.uk](mailto:studentwellbeing@qub.ac.uk)

Adapting to life in a different country can be a difficult and lonely experience at first. If you are struggling, please don't suffer in silence. Remember that there is support available if you need it.

# HOMESICKNESS

Homesickness is the distress caused by being away from home.

People who are homesick often have preoccupying thoughts of home. People experiencing homesickness typically report a combination of low mood, anxiety, being withdrawn and difficulty focusing on tasks. In the case of students, this can be difficulty focusing on university work.

The problem is that many students tend to be hard on themselves, because they think that they should be able to cope. Homesickness is not a sign of weakness. You might be surprised as to how many other students feel like you do. Moving away for university is a big transition, whether you've come from the other side of the world or half an hour down the road.

Here's some ways you can avoid or deal with homesickness:

## ① Understand what homesickness is and don't judge yourself for feeling it

Feeling homesick isn't a weakness, nor is it something you should beat yourself up about. Missing home is something that affects most students – you'll only make the situation worse if you feel guilty about it.

## ② Don't spend too much time in your room alone

It might be tempting to treat your room as a safe haven, but staying in too much can make you feel worse. Isolating yourself will make your feelings more intense, as you'll spend even more time thinking about what you miss. Try to keep yourself busy by taking part in social activities, studying at the library rather than in your room, getting a part time job or even trying out some extracurricular activities.

## ③ Keep your expectations realistic

Try to be realistic in what you expect from university and work out ways to improve your experience if it's not quite what you wanted. Uni is what you make it – if there's something you're not happy with, take control and change this!

## ④ Bring home comforts

Bringing something that reminds you of your room or home can be a big help. Whatever your comfort things are, make sure you bring them to uni with you! Having a sense of comfort and familiarity may help you settle in quicker.

## ⑤ Stay positive

Of course, this can be a lot easier said than done, but making a conscious effort to carry a positive attitude around with you will help you to combat homesickness in a major way. Plan things into your day that you enjoy doing and can look forward to, whether it's socialising with friends or a nice hot bath and episode of your favourite programme.

## ⑥ Ask for help

The jump from school to university can be tough to get your head around at first, and there's no shame in asking for help. If you're having any issues with your course, or anything else for that matter – don't suffer in silence. If you're feeling homesick, worrying about your studies or your finances will only make things worse, so take steps to sort any issues out or get support as soon as they arise. As well as approaching your lecturers directly, the university has a wellbeing service available too – use them, that's what they're there for!

## ⑦ Explore your surroundings

One of the main reasons people feel homesick is often to do with being in unfamiliar surroundings, so it's a great idea to set aside some time to explore the local town or city so you'll feel more at home. Go for walks, explore, volunteer with the local community or just get to grips with what's available on campus. You're only here for a short while, so now's the time to make the most of it!

## ⑧ Keep in touch (but not too much)

Whether it's a phone call, a WhatsApp group chat or a letter in the post, keeping in touch with your friends and family helps keep that link to home. Remember you need to be doing fun stuff in-between as well so you have something to tell people back home all about and memories to look back on.

## ⑨ Keep healthy

When you're feeling rubbish it can be tempting to lie on the sofa watching RomComs crying into a massive tub of ice-cream or chocolates, but this is likely to make you feel a lot worse. Keeping healthy will help to keep you feeling much more positive about life – it's all about that positive cycle!

Finally, remember there's always help out there. If you're struggling with your mental health there are services available at the university which are free to access.

# HEALTHCARE

The first thing you should consider when moving to Belfast is registering at a GP service. The University Health Centre may be the most ideal one for you. They accept new patients Tuesday-Friday between 10am-12.30pm and 1.30pm-3pm. You can find their information by visiting [universityhealthcentreatqueens.co.uk](http://universityhealthcentreatqueens.co.uk)

Having a GP in Belfast means you can easily access care and treatment if you need it. If you don't register and find yourself in a situation where you need medication, you could end up waiting a couple of weeks rather than days.

## The NHS

The National Health Service (NHS) is the free health service in the UK. Patients are only charged for prescriptions (in some places), dental care and sight services.

In the UK, it is FREE for anyone to receive:

- emergency treatment at an Accident & Emergency (A&E) department in a hospital
- emergency treatment in an NHS walk-in centre that gives similar services to an A&E department
- family planning services (e.g. contraception)
- compulsory psychiatric treatment
- treatment for some infectious diseases

Once you are registered with a GP, you only have to contact the GP surgery to make an appointment. It is normal for the appointment to be a couple of weeks later as waiting times can be quite lengthy.

## What can I see a doctor for?

GPs can help with a wide range of health issues, including:

- medical problems, including referrals to a specialist
- mental health issues
- contraception services
- travel advice
- sexually transmitted infections or disease tests

## Confidentiality and medical care

Health records are confidential in the UK, which means that if you're over 16, a doctor is not legally allowed to discuss details of your treatment with anyone unless they have your permission. This includes any member of your family.

There are 3 types of medication in the UK:

1. For prescription medication you need to see a GP or other healthcare professional. You need to take your prescription to a pharmacy to get your medication. Many health centres have their own pharmacy but you can get your medication at any pharmacy you choose.
2. For pharmacy medication ('P' medicines) you don't need a prescription, but you will need to talk to the pharmacist.
3. Over-the-counter (OTC) medication can be bought from pharmacies, supermarkets and other shops without supervision.

## Where can I get advice on contraception?

Contraception services in the UK are free and confidential, and you can talk to a healthcare professional at:

- Most GP surgeries
- Walk-in clinics with family planning clinics
- Some Genitourinary Medicine (GUM) clinics
- Sexual health clinics – The Students' Union hosts a clinic, dates and times can be found at: [q-su.org/Events](http://q-su.org/Events)

## What to do in a medical emergency

In a medical emergency phone 999 and say 'Ambulance'. An operative will ask you to describe the problem and will send help to your location.

Dial 111 for medical help or advice that is NOT an emergency.

# ACADEMIC ADVICE

Academic practices may differ at Queen's to what you are used to from your studies in your home country.

Referencing and paraphrasing are important skills to learn with regards to your studies at Queen's. If you are an undergraduate student, you may want to reach out to the Learning Development Service for additional support on this if you are having difficulty.

Plagiarism and academic misconduct is something that is taken seriously by the

University so doing that little bit extra to improve your academic practice skills is likely to be beneficial and help you avoid any penalties.

If you are contacted at any stage during the course of your studies regarding an allegation of an academic offence, get in touch with SU Advice and we'll be happy to offer support and guidance with this process.

# VISA SUPPORT

If you have any questions about your visa or immigration regulations following on from a University process or for any reason, you can contact Immigration Student Support (ISS).

They are able to answer these questions for you.

Email: [iss@qub.ac.uk](mailto:iss@qub.ac.uk)

# HOUSING

Most International students will opt to stay in University residences or a private halls of residence in their first year. Some will then either continue to stay here for the remainder of their studies or look to move into the private rented sector.

There are a lot of rules and regulations surrounding private rented housing

so you may find yourself entering unknown territory. If you have any questions of concerns or would like a little more information on where to look for this, you can contact SU Advice and we will do our best to help.



# MONEY

## Managing Your Finances

Queen's Students' Union has subscribed to an online financial wellbeing resource called Blackbullion.

You can register for Blackbullion using your Queen's email and, by indicating you are a student from Queen's Students' Union, you will be given free

and unlimited access to all Blackbullion resources and information.

Topics covered include budgeting, avoiding financial scams and there are also specific resources for international students arriving to study in the UK for the first time.

## Financial Support

If during your time at university, you face unexpected and exceptional financial hardship, you can submit an application for the University Financial Assistance Fund. This is a one-off payment with the aim of providing short-term financial support to students who need it.

You will need to provide evidence to support your application and there is no automatic right or entitlement to this. If you do find yourself in financial difficulties during your studies, you can contact SU Advice for information.

## Scams

A scam is a method of conning someone out of their money. It can be done by post, phone, email, text or online. It can sometimes even happen when someone calls to your front door. Scams can be disguised as a purchase of goods, entering competitions and on occasions job offers.

Money laundering is a scam that students can be particularly susceptible to. Some criminals have been targeting international students specifically, pretending to be from a legitimate organisation (such as the UK Home

Office, and education agent or UKISA). They demand money - calling it a "fine" and that it must be paid immediately or there will be damaging consequences, such as deportation.

If you are approached, keep the following in mind:

- S – Seems too good to be true
- C – Contacted out of the blue
- A – Asked for personal details
- M – Money has been requested

## Money Mules

We are aware of a growing scam which seeks to recruit individuals, through illicit job adverts, to money-launder thousands of pounds to criminal gangs abroad – the proceeds of which fund an international trade in drugs, people trafficking, and terrorism.

People who get involved in this type of scam are commonly referred to as money mules. Research shows that these fraudsters are targeting students, especially international students.

The recipient of the offer is invited to receive money into their bank account

and transfer it to another account, retaining a proportion for themselves. In reality, the money received is stolen, often the result of fraud on accounts, and is then laundered to overseas bank accounts.

This is illegal and can have severe consequences. If you get asked to do this, we would advise that you do not get involved and that you contact SU Advice for advice.





# GET IN TOUCH

University life can throw up difficult situations and challenges. At times you might have money, housing, academic, funding or conduct issues.

We're here to give you free, independent, confidential, and non-judgemental advice on these issues and more, if and when you need it.

## Drop-In

Pop in for a 15minute chat during the following Drop-In times:

Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays: 11.30am - 2pm

You can find us on the Third Floor of Queen's Students' Union.

## Email

Reach out to our friendly team by contacting:

[su.advice@qub.ac.uk](mailto:su.advice@qub.ac.uk)

## Visit

We have lots of information and resources on our website at: [q-su.org/advice](http://q-su.org/advice)