



Student Life Essentials 22/23

We're glad you're here! SOAS welcomes over 5000 new and returning students through our doors every year, and our community of students and alumni comes from over 130 countries. From day one you will be encouraged to think globally, studying an interdisciplinary curriculum in a dynamic, supportive and diverse learning environment led by our world-leading academics. SOAS is a truly unique institution, and we're excited to help you make the most of your time with us.

This guide is designed to offer useful information if you are joining SOAS. Our students come from a wide variety of places and backgrounds, so there is a lot included here. Read it from cover to cover, or skip ahead to find what you need.

When you arrive at SOAS you will receive the Student Handbook with further information about SOAS.

We hope you will find this information helpful and we look forward to seeing you at SOAS.

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Pre-arrival essentials

Booking your travel

Take a look at the information below if you're booking tickets to travel. We don't want you to be caught out!

- Make sure you understand your rights to amend or cancel any bookings if needed.
- Make sure you check your baggage allowance before booking your tickets. Each airline differs in the amount of free baggage you can travel with!
- Some airlines have different restrictions on the number of items you're allowed to take onboard. This applies to items like laptops and phones. Make sure you check what you can bring before you travel.
- It's really important that you check the airport codes you are booking for match the airport that you want to land in — London has 5 major airports and it can be confusing: **London City, London Gatwick, London Heathrow, London Luton and London Stansted.**
- Make sure you plan your onward journey before you arrive at the airport. You can visit the airport's website for information on how to get to your final destination from there. There will be a choice of buses, trains and taxis, as well as information on how to book tickets.

Packing

You can buy most clothing and household items that you will need when you arrive in London, as well as online. SOAS is located near some great shopping spots, like Oxford Street, so you will never be too far away from anything you need. It's a good idea to pack as lightly as possible and avoid shipping items over to the UK as this can be more expensive than buying what you need once you're here.

Remember to check the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website for information on what you can and can't bring into the UK.

Remember that UK electric appliances are fitted with a **3-pin plug**. If the country that you are travelling from uses a lower voltage than the UK average of 230v (you can find your countries average voltage online), you may also need to buy a transformer - they are really easy to buy online once you arrive in the UK.

Pre-arrival essentials

Visas

If you don't already hold an immigration status that allows study in the UK, you'll need to successfully apply for a Student visa to enrol on your program. As your Student visa sponsor, SOAS has certain legal obligations to ensure that we maintain this sponsorship according to current UK Visas immigration rules and regulations. You can familiarise yourself with your obligations on our website. Students on programs of less than 6 months may be able to apply for a Standard Visitor visa instead. You should only travel to the UK when your visa is valid. You can read our comprehensive visa application guides to help you through the process step by step.

<https://www.soas.ac.uk/international/entry/>

Money

You might find it useful to open a UK bank account so that you can set up direct debits and standing orders to pay your bills. If you're working, your employer normally pays your wages into your UK bank account. You should plan how you will pay for things for the first few weeks as it may take a while to open an account. Generally, you can't open one until you arrive in the UK. It is important to let your local bank know that you are moving to the UK so they don't block your debit or credit card when it is being used overseas. Most UK banks will need you to provide certain documents to open an account, such as:

- A 'bank letter' from SOAS which can be requested from the Student Hub once enrolled
- Proof of identity, such as a passport
- Proof of your UK address, such as your tenancy agreement
- Proof of your immigration status

There's also the option of opening an app-based account which may be quicker and need less documents. We don't recommend any bank in particular so it's important to do your own research on which bank or building society is right for you.

Pre-arrival essentials

Working while studying

If you are thinking of looking for part-time work while you are studying in the UK, you need to check either your Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) or visa vignette (in your passport) or your visa decision notice first to see what work conditions UK Visas and Immigration have endorsed your visa with. You will either have work restriction or prohibition. If you are allowed to work, you may also have a restriction on the number of hours you can work during term-time as well as the types of work you can do. It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand your work conditions and that you adhere to any restrictions.

Working during my studies: <https://www.soas.ac.uk/international/entry/working/>

GOV.UK - Prove my right to work: <https://www.gov.uk/prove-right-to-work>

Income Tax

International students who work in the UK will automatically be subject to the same taxation rules that apply to UK citizens. You may be charged income tax, but this will depend on the amount you earn. More information is available online: <https://www.gov.uk/income-tax-rates>

National Insurance

Anyone who works in the UK must apply for a National Insurance number, which makes sure your National Insurance contributions and tax are recorded against your name only. Your employer may deduct National Insurance contributions from your wages depending on how much you earn. You don't need to have this number when you start looking for work but you must apply once you have started working.

GOV.UK - National Insurance number: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-national-insurance-number>

Council Tax

Council Tax is an annual fee that residents pay to their local government to fund local services such as waste collection, fire and police services and general maintenance. You may not have to pay this fee during your programme if:

- You're enrolled on a program lasting at least 1 year, involving at least 21 hours of study per week, or
- You're under 20 and enrolled on a programme at RQF level 3 that lasts at least 3 months or involves at least 12 hours of study per week.

UKCISA - Council Tax: <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Fees-and-Money/Council-Tax>

Settling In

When you arrive in London, there are a few things you should do as soon as possible;

Register with a doctor

You should register with a doctor (GP) near to where you live so you can get treatment more easily if you become unwell. If you've paid the Immigration Health Surcharge then visits to your GP and hospital treatment will be free, but you will still need to pay for medicine prescribed by your doctor, dental treatment and eye tests.

If you currently take regular medication or have a medical condition that requires ongoing treatment, you should bring a supply of medicine and a note from your local doctor so that your new doctor in London can help you more effectively. You may wish to consider taking out medical insurance to access and pay for private healthcare in the UK if the National Health Service (NHS) does not provide the treatment you need.

If you have a medical emergency, call 999 and ask for an ambulance or visit the nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) department found in a hospital. For non-emergencies, call the NHS on 111 who will provide professional advice and tell you where you can get help if you're not sure what to do.

Immigration Health Surcharge: <https://www.gov.uk/healthcare-immigration-application>

National Health Service: <https://www.nhs.uk/>

Registering with the police

On 5 August 2022, the Home Office abolished the requirement to register with the Police with immediate effect. This change affects those who have already registered or who have an appointment to register or who have a requirement to register with the Police stated on their immigration document. Read the UKCISA website for more information and contact Student Advice Service if you are confused or unsure about this change.

UKCISA - Registering with the police: <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Visas-and-Immigration/Protecting-your-Student-status#police-registration--no-longer-required>

Settling In

Keeping in touch

Getting a UK mobile phone plan is an easy way to be able to keep in touch with friends and family whilst studying in the UK, but calling international numbers from the UK can be expensive, especially if you use your mobile. We recommend apps like **Skype, WeChat, Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp** to keep in touch with family and friends at home.

Alternatively, you can buy international calling cards from most local shops. You can also make the most of public telephones dotted around the city.

To keep in touch with new friends in London and the UK, we recommend getting a UK mobile number. There are different types of mobile phone plans you can choose from. It's a good idea to research them so you can find what is best for you!

- **Pay Monthly:** you'll sign a contract for a fixed length of time, usually for 12 to 24 months.
- **Pay As You Go:** buy credit when you need it.
- **SIM-only:** like Pay Monthly but you'll only be committed to a rolling 30-day contract and won't get a mobile phone - so remember to bring your current phone.



Settling In

London Life

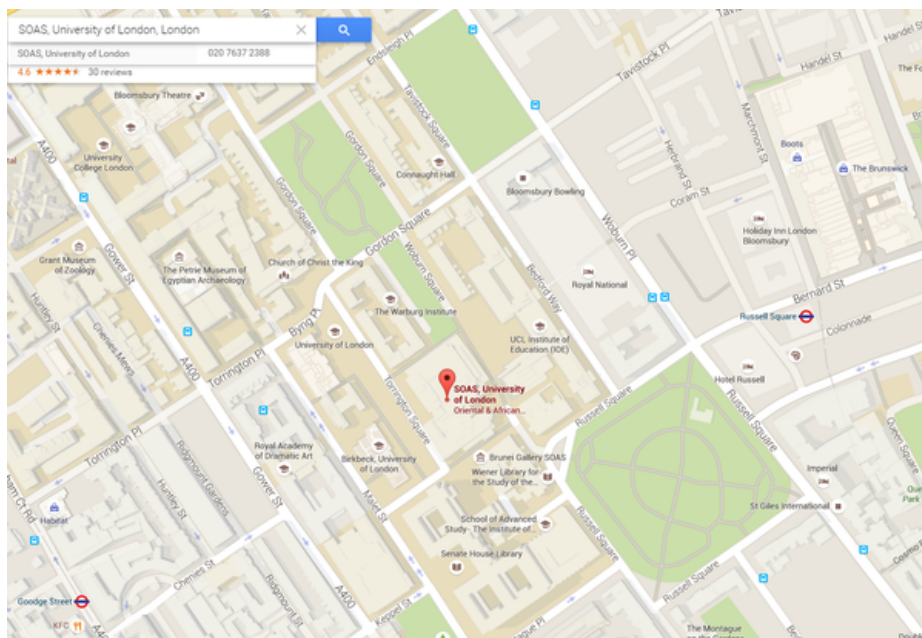
SOAS is known around both the University of London and the wider community in Bloomsbury as a social hub.

From Brixton's cafés to the art and music rooms of Hackney, from the restaurants aligning the route of the famous Notting Hill Carnival to the Dickensian-esque waterside pubs along the Thames en route to Greenwich, London has it all. SOAS is situated in the very heart of London in historic Bloomsbury, an area renowned for its fashionable cafés and restaurants, green spaces, book stores, museums and arts venues. The British Museum, British Library, Regent's Park and the West End are all within walking distance of our vibrant campus. SOAS is also close to several Underground stations, making it easy for you to explore all parts of this great city.

Working in London

In order to enjoy all that is on offer, you might want to supplement your income – jobs for students are always available in London. Not only can working in London help to enhance your CV, it is also a great way of gaining some valuable practical experience.

However, before accepting any employment opportunity, you must be confident it will not negatively affect your studies. All our undergraduate programmes are offered on a full-time basis only and you must satisfy the work, attendance and visa requirements in order to progress through the academic years.



Settling In

Travelling around London

London is a big city! There are multiple ways to get around so the best thing to do is plan your journey by using Transport for London's (TFL) 'journey planner', or apps like **Citymapper** to help you find your way around.

Underground

The easiest method of travel is the London Underground. It's the quickest way to travel in and around London, some underground lines are open 24 hours at weekends.

London Underground and Overground trains are divided into 'zones' with most operating in zones 1 to 9. SOAS and most of central London attractions are based in Zone 1.

Travelling outside the busiest hours, which are between 6.30am - 9.30am and 4pm - 7pm on the weekdays is cheaper and quieter.

Buses

Buses cover all of London, and you can get from one zone to another for a set fare.

Most buses stop at midnight, however there are night buses available on main routes. Look for the "Night Owl" icon on timetables. These services run 24/7.

Settling In

Ways to pay

London is a great city to be a student. Here are some tips to help you get around, travel safely and save money on your fares.

You can save 30% on Travel Cards and Bus & Tram passes with the [18+ Student Oyster Photocard](#)

Railcards

Get a [16-25 Railcard](#) or [26-30 Railcard](#) and add it to your 18+ Student Oyster photocard, or standard adult Oyster card to get 34% off pay as you go off-peak fares and daily caps for:

- **Tube**
- **London Overground**
- **Elizabeth line**
- **most National Rail services in London**

Use pay as you go

If you live near your school, college or university, or only make a few journeys, it could be cheaper to travel using pay as you go, instead of travelling with a discounted Travelcard or Bus & Tram Pass.

- You can use your 18+ Student Oyster card, a standard adult Oyster card or contactless (card or device) to pay as you go.

Walking

Walking is a great way to get around London. You are always in walking distance of another Tube stop you recognise. If you get lost, **Google Maps** and other similar apps like **CityMapper** will help you find your way.

[Walking Tube Map](#)

Cycling

Cycling is also a great way to get around the city. There are miles of dedicated [cycling routes](#) and plenty of maps to help guide you around.

Use your own bike or hire a [Santander Cycle](#). You can ride from as little as £2 a day or [get 25% off yearly membership](#) to explore the city.

London is busy, so remember your helmet!

Taxis

Minicabs must be booked with a [licensed minicab company](#), via app, online, phone or in a minicab office. Always check your booking confirmation. If the driver or car isn't the same, don't get in - it isn't safe.

Only [black taxis](#) can be hailed off the street or from one of 600 taxi ranks across London. They can also be booked by phone or app. Every taxi has a card machine, so if you don't have cash, you can pay using credit, debit or contactless.

Settling In

Exploring London

Culture and Art

Most of London's museums and galleries are open every day and free to enter. Take a look at our list of London's best museums below!

Remember, as a SOAS Student you can also visit the Brunei Gallery located right on campus. It is free to enter and hosts a programme of changing contemporary and historical exhibitions from Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

- [Tate Modern](#)
- [Tate Britain](#)
- [Royal Academy of Arts \(RA\)](#)
- [Saatchi Gallery](#)
- [Courtauld Gallery](#)
- [Photographers' Gallery](#)
- [The Design Museum](#)
- [Museum of London Docklands](#)
- [Imperial War Museum](#)
- [Museum of London](#)
- [British Museum](#)
- [Victoria and Albert Museum \(V&A\)](#)

Outdoor spaces

Living in Central London can be overwhelming, but there are loads of spaces where you can wind down and relax:

- Regent's Park is just a short walk away from SOAS. You can follow the canal walk or check out the boating lake.
- Visit Hampstead Heath Park, Richmond Park and Primrose Hill for unique views of London.
- For a more local spot, Russell Square is a great place to meet friends for lunch or study in the summer sun.
- Check out Brockwell Park, Hampstead Heath or Tooting Bec Lido's for an outdoor swim.
- Kew Gardens is a great spot and boasts several cafes with views of the beautiful gardens.

Must-sees near SOAS

SOAS is in a great location right in the center of London surrounded by a ton of hot-spots. Here are a few we think you should check out:

- **Oxford Street:** the best place for shopping in the city is just a short walk from the SOAS campus. You will find everything you need here, as well as loads of great food spots.
- **Bloomsbury Farmers Market:** Bloomsbury's best destination for breakfast, brunch, lunch or anything in between on Thursdays right outside of SOAS.
- **British Museum:** Located no more than a 5 minute walk from SOAS, the British Museum is a great, free activity. Why not check of the many exhibitions they have on.
- **Southbank:** London's Southbank is a great spot for food, drinks, arts and culture. It's located a 15 minute bus ride away and is also home to the famous London Eye!

Next steps...

We hope this guide has excited and reassured you about coming to SOAS and London.

There's lots to look forward to. As part of our Welcome Week, you'll be invited to Department Talks, events and many other social and cultural activities where you'll get a chance to meet other students and find out more about SOAS.

Look out for more details on our website; we'll be adding essential information over the summer to help you begin your journey with us.

We look forward to welcoming you.

