

HOW TO LIVE IN BRITAIN 1989

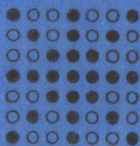
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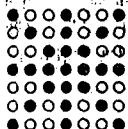
HOW TO LIVE IN BRITAIN 1989

The British Council's guide for
overseas students and visitors

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J E Melrose-Woodman 1984

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WELCOME TO BRITAIN

Britain is used to welcoming visitors and its rich mixture of peoples and varied cultural heritage make it a fascinating and rewarding country in which to live. This booklet is an introduction for people planning to visit us, mostly students, but we hope it will be helpful to other visitors, tourists and businessmen and women who plan to stay here a while.

Chapters 1 and 2 cover the important factors in the decision to come, and the arrangements you need to make beforehand. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 see you safely arrived in Britain with somewhere to live and your money and health taken care of. Finally, Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 aim to help you make the most of everything Britain has to offer from public services and educational opportunities to the beautiful countryside, architecture, the arts and sport. Most important, Chapters 7 and 8 will help you to get to know the British people better, so that together we can build up both understanding and friendships which may last for many years.

We have tried to think about and solve problems which may arise through differences in practice and conditions between other countries and Britain. We hope by doing this to make the move to Britain easier and to give the visitor a smooth and happy transition to a new and exciting country.

1 DECIDING TO COME

This chapter covers all the aspects of your stay in Britain which you should consider before you finally decide to come. Think carefully about all the questions raised: if you can answer all of them positively your stay in Britain will be off to a successful start. If this chapter presents problems it also tries to offer positive ways to overcome them, so don't lose heart.

Is my English good enough?

English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and, as such, can be extremely useful both socially and professionally. It is more important than anything else, if your stay is to be a success, that you can speak, write and understand English well. Not only do you need to speak it well enough to find your way round cities, public transport, shops, libraries and other places and to hold conversations with people you meet; but, more important, you must be fluent enough to follow lectures and contribute to discussions in your course of study, which will probably involve a much wider and often quite technical vocabulary. If you are not sufficiently fluent, the results of your course may be disappointing, reflecting your inadequacy in the language rather than your ability in the subject.

For this reason, most universities and colleges will not accept you on a course without evidence of fluency in English. If you would like to check on the standard of your English, you can go to the British Council in your own country, where you can assess your fluency by taking the English Language Testing Service (ELTS) Test. Most places of higher education in Britain recognize a score of 6 or above as an acceptable level for academic study.

If your English needs improving, it is obviously better to take a language course before leaving home. If this is not possible arrange, either in advance or as soon as you arrive, to join a course in Britain. Most local education authorities here run day or evening classes and the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) publishes a booklet on courses in London, *English Classes for Students from Abroad*. The British Association of State Colleges in English Language Teaching (BASCELT) also publishes a handbook which gives details of courses offered throughout the United Kingdom (address in Appendix 2). There are also plenty of private language schools which run mostly day

courses, but their fees will be higher than the state-run courses. You can get a list of private schools from the Association for Recognized English Language Teaching Establishments (ARELS/FELCO); address in Appendix 2. The British Council publishes a series of information sheets under the general title *English Studies Information Service*, available from your nearest Council office. They cover a wide variety of courses in Britain for both learners and teachers of English.

Can I afford it?

We would like you to be able to enjoy your stay in Britain without money worries, so please spend some time working out exactly how much it will cost for your particular course, for the sort of place you would like to live and for the things you would like to be able to do.

Cost of the course

Most first degree courses in the United Kingdom are three years in length so that overall costs may be less than in other countries where a degree course takes longer. Chart A gives the *minimum* tuition fees for various types of courses at different kinds of colleges, but it is safer to confirm the exact amount of fees from your chosen college as soon as possible as some charge more than those in the chart. Nationals of the European Community who have been living in the EC for the three years before the course starts are normally only charged fees at home student rates. If you are an EC national applying for a first degree course or equivalent and have not already done a similar course elsewhere, you may be eligible for reimbursement of your fees by the British government. For more information consult the college where you will be studying.

Basic living costs

In 1988 single students would need about £375 a month (£4,500 a year) to meet basic living expenses: rent, heating, lighting, food, daily fares, medical cover and other basic necessities. The figures given are averages, taken over the whole of Britain. You could find that living in some city areas, such as London, is more expensive than in other parts of the country. You may find you can live more cheaply or you may want to enjoy a more expensive life-style.

Rent and medical cover are discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5; the other elements are discussed below.

Heating

Britain can be cold for much of the year and students from hot countries may need heating for as long as eight months in the year. Cheap lodgings are not often centrally heated and the gas or electric fires provided are usually controlled by coin meters. In very cold weather, you might have

to put in as much as £2 in one evening; allow a minimum of £10 a week for heating in the winter.

Food

Based on a western-style diet of breakfast, a hot evening meal, and all meals at weekends eaten at home, plus £2 a day to cover your midday meal in the college canteen, a weekly cost of about £30 is likely.

Daily fares

Obviously these will vary depending on how far you live from the college and the shops. You can usually buy a weekly, monthly or annual ticket; for example, a weekly ticket covering three zones in London costs £9.65. If you live further from your place of study you may need up to £16 a week.

Other basic necessities

To cover such items as launderette and dry cleaning, toilet and household articles, stationery, stamps and telephone calls you would need about £5.00 a week.

Additions

Medical insurance for either six months or a year may need to be added (see page 35), so allow at least £80.

Postgraduate students should allow another £415—£546 a year for preparation of their theses and for study visits.

On top of your day-to-day living expenses, allow an amount of money for initial expenses when you first arrive:

	£
books	200
warm clothing (Chart D)	242—279
deposits (eg for accommodation, see page 29)	155

All the amounts above are for a single student; married students with families will spend considerably more (see page 8).

Leisure expenditure

It would be very frustrating to find you can't take advantage of the variety of opportunities open to you during your stay. Here is some idea of costs for things likely to interest you.

Reading matter

daily newspaper 20p — 30p (foreign language papers are more)
magazines 85p
paperback books £3.00 upwards
(Books can be borrowed free from public libraries)

Cigarettes range from £1.50 to £2.00 for a packet of twenty.

TV and radio

In a hall of residence there may be a communal television. A colour television costs about £300 to buy or £12 per month to rent. A licence for a black and white television costs £21 a year and for a colour television £62.50.

Radios cost about £15 upwards, stereo cassette players from £50 and records and tapes from about £6.00 each.

TV video films can be rented from £2 a night.

Sports

Many public sports facilities are subsidized by the state and can be used for a relatively small sum:

swimming	75p—£1.00
squash	£1.80—£2.50 per ½ hour
tennis	£1.50—£2.50 per hour

Museums and galleries

Britain is rich in museums and galleries and entrance is very often free.

Eating out

There is a large variety of places to eat out (more detail in Chapter 8) but the following gives an idea of the range in cost:

	£	£
	<i>lunch</i>	<i>dinner</i>
college canteen	1.50	2.00
inexpensive restaurant	3.50	5.50

The average pub or cafe price for drinks is:

coffee	45p	spirits (1 measure)	90p
tea	35p	beer (half pint)	55p
soft drinks	50p	glass of wine	£1.00

An evening out

The cost of this will vary according to area, cities generally being more expensive than country areas although of course the range of places and prices is far greater:

cinema	£2.00—£5.50
theatre	£3.00—£17.50
concert	£4.00—£16.00

Student reductions are often available if you have a recognized student identity card. Places providing music to dance to usually charge an entrance fee of several pounds and may also charge considerably more than pubs for drinks.

Travel

If at all possible, do allow yourself some money to travel, both within Britain and in Europe. Public transport in Britain is covered in more detail in Chapter 6 where you can find sample costs.

Student reductions are available on most forms of travel in the UK and National Union of Students' student flights abroad are much cheaper than scheduled flights.

Coach and rail travel in Europe is roughly in line with the UK and again student discounts or special rates are usually available. If you wish to return home for visits during your course, remember to allow for return fares home as well.

Supplementing your income

Please don't expect to earn any money by working if you are on a full-time course. The demands of the course are normally too great to allow full-time work. However, bona fide Commonwealth citizens and foreign nationals who are full-time students may work part-time or in vacations, providing that their conditions of entry allow it and they get approval of the Department of Employment (DE) *in advance* (address in Appendix 2). A work permit will sometimes be given providing:

- work does not interfere with study;
- no suitable British resident is available for the job;
- the student receives the standard rate of pay.

EC nationals (except for Greeks, Spaniards and Portuguese) do *not* need a work permit and may take any job (except in public service) without DE approval.

Having said this, the current high rate of unemployment in Britain means that not only are work permits difficult to get, but even EC nationals may not be able to find work. In Northern Ireland it is still more difficult for students to get permission, even for part-time work, but if you want to try, apply to the Department of Economic Development in Belfast (address in Appendix 2), and not the Department of Employment.

The wives of married students may be free to take employment without Department of Employment permission; please see below.

What about my family?

Married students have the difficult choice whether or not to bring their partners and children to Britain with them. You may feel you would like their company and that their presence would positively help you to enjoy Britain and study well. You may like them to experience life here, or you may simply not like leaving them at home. However, consider the following points carefully before deciding, because bringing a family can create its own problems.

Immigration and employment

The dependants of EC nationals are usually automatically allowed to enter Britain for six months. However, there is a condition that they will not become a charge on public funds; so students will need to show not only that they can meet the costs of their courses and maintain

themselves, but also that they can support their dependants. However, all EC nationals (except Greeks, Spaniards and Portuguese) are free to take up employment or set up in business, without a work permit, so once in Britain the non-studying partner *may* be able to find work and contribute some earned income towards family funds.

Similarly, the wife and children of *foreign or Commonwealth students* will be allowed to enter Britain for the same period as the student husband providing the student can show he is able and willing to support and accommodate his wife and any children under eighteen years, without the need for public funds. The wife will be free to get a job without Department of Employment permission but only if her husband has simply a *student restriction* from working. If the husband is *prohibited* from working here, the prohibition extends to the wife. Both husband and wife may also have to register at a police station if a note in their passport requires it (see page 25).

Husbands

As stated above, the wife and children of a male student have a right to join him in Britain so long as he proves he can accommodate and maintain them, and the whole family intends to return home at the end of his studies. However, the husband and children of a female student have no such automatic rights. It is more usual for the husband and children to be allowed into Britain only as visitors of the female student, not as her dependants. Visitor's status is usually for six months in the first instance, up to a maximum of twelve months. This also means that visiting husbands and children of female students do not share her National Health Service status and would require private medical insurance (see page 35).

Accommodation

Some married student accommodation is provided by colleges and voluntary organizations but it is often booked up in advance before the end of the previous academic year. So you may find yourself competing in the open market with many British families and groups of young people. There is a shortage of family housing everywhere in Britain, so be prepared to spend some time looking, well in advance of the start of the academic year.

Therefore, do think carefully about bringing your family over with you unless you have already arranged accommodation for all of you, otherwise you may end up paying at least £50 a day for a double hotel room over a period of several weeks or even months.

It is clearly much more sensible to arrive on your own, in plenty of time to find somewhere, and to send for your family *only* when you have found somewhere to live and you are quite sure you can afford all the costs involved.

It would probably also be useful at this stage to look ahead to the section in Chapter 4 which covers types of accommodation. You will be in the most expensive category of housing on Chart C, so expect to pay at least £120 a week and all the costs associated with renting a house or self-contained flat. In particular, read the paragraphs on self-contained flats/houses, rent agreements, deposits and notice periods. Your tenancy will probably be for a minimum of six months, so you will be committed for at least this period.

Bringing the children

Naturally couples will want to keep their children with them. But apart from needing more space and more money for living costs and return fares, there are several other practical considerations.

If the children are young you will probably have to look after them yourselves as domestic help is hard to find and expensive. There are private day nurseries which take children under school age, but many have waiting lists and the cost may be as much as £35 a week for each child. An alternative is a child-minder who looks after other people's children in her own home. The cost is from £25 to £35 per week. A list of registered child-minders is available from the Social Services Department of any local authority. Local authorities and a few colleges also run day nurseries but this is not a useful option as their waiting lists are too long. If the children are of school age (from five to sixteen years) and your course will keep you here six months or longer, you should be able to find a school to take them. But the local authority may not have vacancies. Also, to take them to school and collect them each day and look after them in the holidays may be difficult if one parent is in full-time study and the other in full-time work. Under British law, children under sixteen are not allowed to be left alone in a house for any length of time, so an older child cannot be left to look after younger children. Depending on how long you are in Britain, you may consider it less disruptive and problematic to leave them at home with relatives.

Counting the cost

You can work out most of the extra costs involved in keeping your family here from the information given earlier in this chapter and in Charts C and D.

The basic living costs for twelve months for a couple would be approximately £6,900.

If you have children add a further £688 to £1,140 for each child. On top of these basic costs you may need to add a sum for warm clothing for yourself and family, an amount for leisure expenditure and possibly medical insurance (see page 35). All this will be in addition to the costs of your course.

Educational opportunities

It is almost as important for your partner to speak good English as it is for you. Everyday activities such as shopping and perhaps more important, making friends, will be very difficult with poor English, while getting work will be almost impossible. The effect can be very isolating. If your partner is willing to learn or improve his/her English, it shouldn't be difficult to find a course (see the suggestions on pages 2 and 3).

Once proficient in English, there are many part-time and evening classes on offer so that your partner, too, can take advantage of Britain's educational opportunities. For more information on these, see Chapter 9.

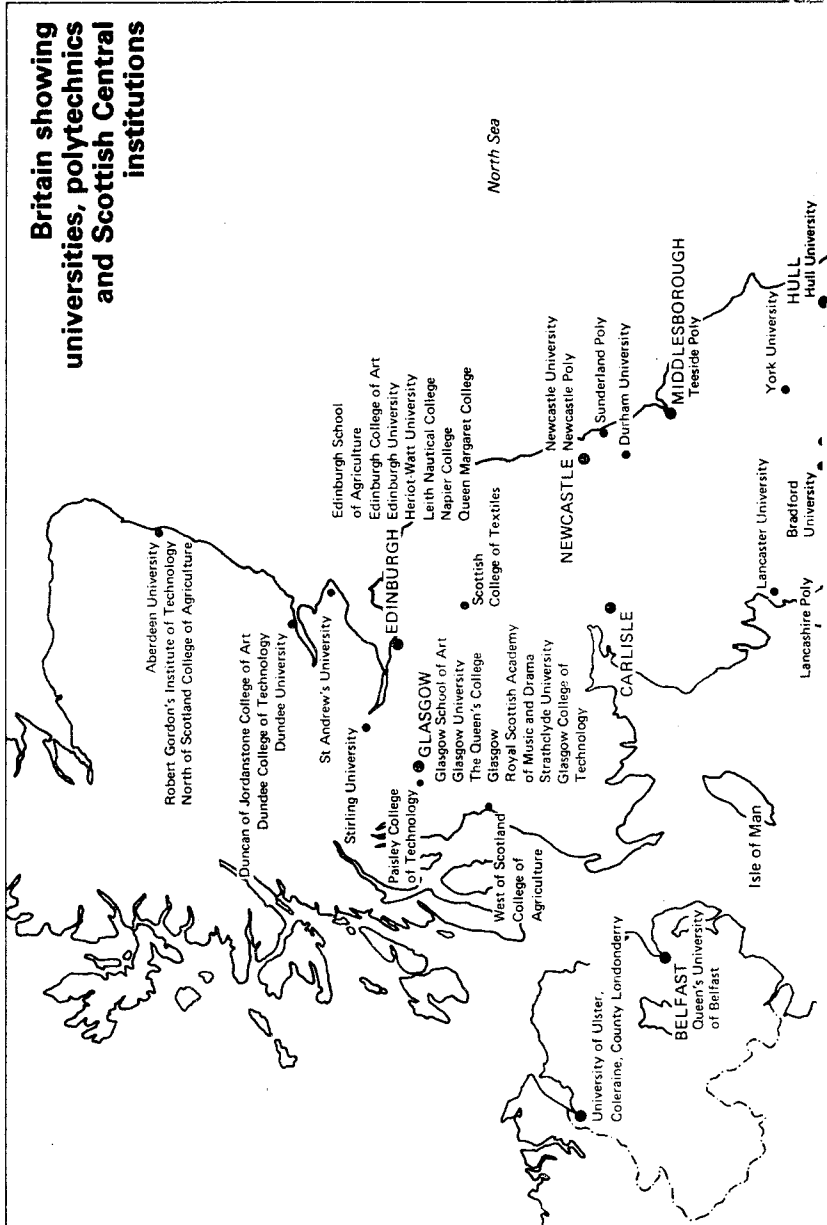
The importance of planning

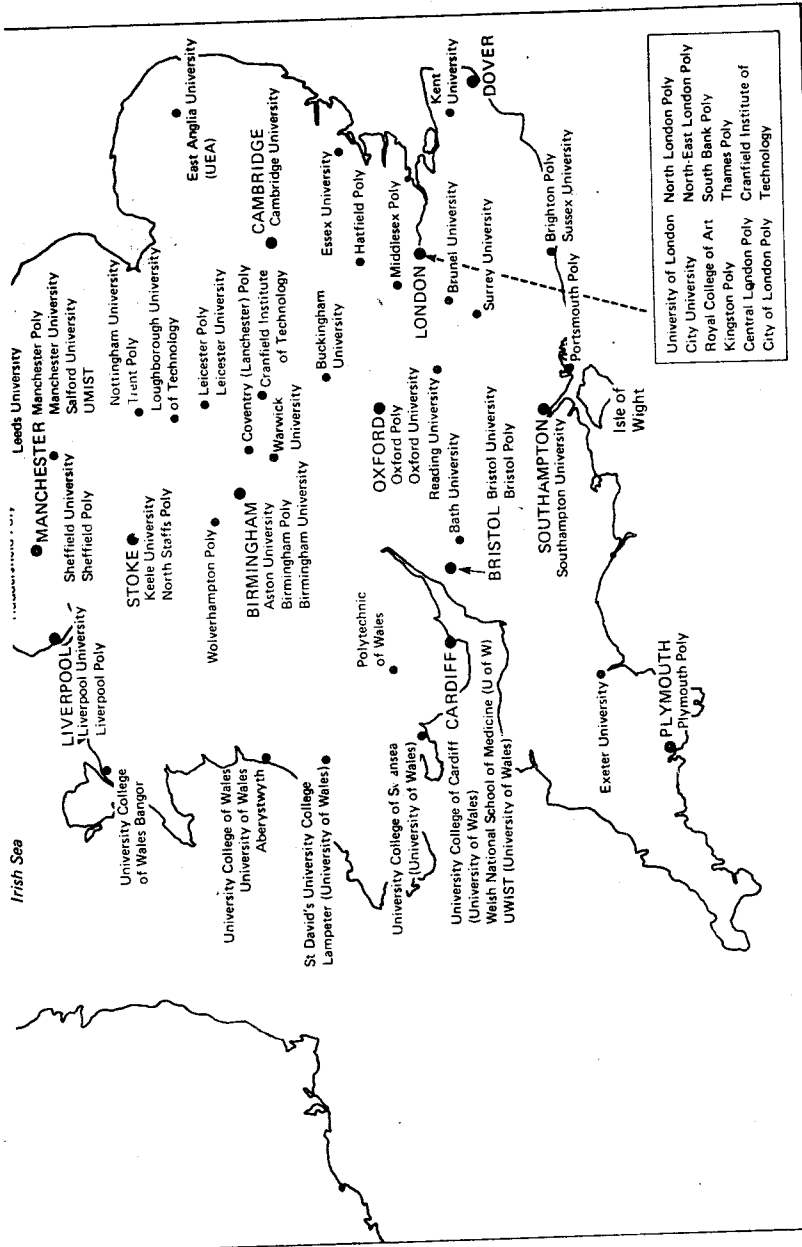
Some married students have thoroughly enjoyed bringing their families to Britain, while for others the experience has been a disaster. The factor which decides success or failure seems to be the amount of planning and preparation which the student has put in *before* the family has actually arrived. Families who come to Britain together, unprepared and 'hoping for the best', may be overwhelmed by difficulties. Those whose families join them later, when doubts about accommodation and money have been resolved, are likely to have far fewer problems. Please bear in mind that both your family's happiness and your own educational success can be put at risk by vague plans or no plans at all.

The au pair alternative

Single girls between seventeen and twenty-seven years inclusive with no dependants, who are nationals of a West European country (including Malta, Cyprus and Turkey) may come to Britain as an au pair, to learn English while living as a member of an English-speaking family. This generally involves helping the family, for example, with the children, in return for free food and accommodation, a small amount of pocket money, and sufficient free time to follow a course of study. More information on au pair arrangements is available from your nearest British Embassy/Consulate or British Council Office. If you visit Britain under this arrangement, bring with you, when you arrive, a letter from the family where you will be staying, with details of the family, the duties they would like you to carry out and the pocket money and time off you expect to receive.

Britain showing universities, polytechnics and Scottish Central institutions





There are over 800 institutes of further and higher education whose location cannot be included on the map.