

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



# International Student Survival Guide

*(for international students, by international students)*

[www.birmingham.ac.uk/welcome](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/welcome)

# Introduction

This International Student Survival Guide has been put together for you by a group of international and European students.

The aim of the guide is to give you a range of hints and tips on how to survive your first year at University. Who better to tell you than the students who've been through it all already!



We hope you find it helpful.



# Prepare for university in advance

It's never too early to start buying and packing – try to make sure you leave yourself plenty of time to pick up anything you've forgotten. **Being prepared will put you at ease** and make you confident that you are ready to go.

## Technology – Adaptors

Although you can easily buy them at a store called Poundland for £1, we definitely wish we had packed a proper socket adaptor for our laptops to bring with us when we came to the UK – if you do then, no matter what happens on your first day at the University, you'll at least be able to use your laptop!

Also, don't forget that the UK operates on 220V, so you may want to consider a transformer if you are bringing any electric devices that operates at a lower voltage which does not already have a built-in transformer.



## Mobile Phones

In the UK, you have two options for a mobile phone:

- A) If you sign a contract, you get a phone for a reduced price. However, if you have a limited credit history in the UK, you are likely to have to pay a deposit that will be refunded to you after 6 months. Read the contract carefully, once you sign it, you're required to pay the monthly fee for the duration of the contract which are usually 24 months even if you want to end your contract early. Although 12 month contracts are available, they tend to be more expensive.
- B) An alternative option is to get a pay-as-you-go phone which is expensive up front but at least you don't have to worry about contracts. Some students prefer pay-as-you-go tariffs with a smart phone as they're able to save money by using the wireless network on campus to make calls via Skype or Google Talk.





### Clothes

Temperatures in the UK may be lower than what you are used to so be sure to bring plenty of warm clothes like thick socks and slippers to wear in your accommodation.

Be sure to bring black and white formal wear. Every school/department has a formal ball at the end of the academic year so you'll want to be prepared for that! You'll also want to have a smart outfit for jobs and interviews. A warm waterproof coat is always useful for rainy days.

### Kitchen Utensils

If you plan to cook most of your meals yourself, it might be a good idea to pack the bare essentials for your kitchen such as a pot or pan so you can prepare some nice meals from your first day. You'll be able to buy the rest of your kitchen supplies at relatively affordable prices on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or at Argos in the City Centre.



- Don't forget to bring along things that make you feel at home such as sentimental possessions including posters, photos, teddy bears, or even incense to help you feel at ease.
- Shops on campus can seem a little expensive, be sure to check out Poundland first, everything is a pound, even a notebook.

- Visit [www.soundasapound.co.uk](http://www.soundasapound.co.uk) for tips and coupons with deals to use in Birmingham.
- If you're unsure whether you have found the best bargain, we recommend doing some research at [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com)

# Your choice of accommodation

Be sure to **research your options of accommodation**, you can choose from University or private accommodation.

**University Accommodation is divided by three different locations:**

## Vale Village:

- Mason
- Shackleton
- Tennis Courts
- Maple Bank
- Elgar Court
- Aitken
- Chelwood

The Vale village is the largest University accommodation, housing over 2,000 students. It is a 15–20 minute walk away from the main University Campus. It is the only Village which offers the **meal plan** which credits your University ID card with £44.25 a week but does not roll over each week, meaning that you cannot accumulate money left over. The plan is good because you can use it to get food at various outlets both on campus and in the Vale Village. It's great because you don't have to cook everyday but remember that the meal plan allowance is not sufficient for 3 meals per day, 7 days a week. You will need to arrange some meals (we suggest you make your own breakfast) yourself.

The meal plan has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, you are 'paying' for time, because you do not have to shop, cook or clean everyday (and we can tell you, this is a lot of time) which you will appreciate in your first year! On the other hand, the food may be very different to what you are used to and it can work out more expensive (especially if you eat a lot). In addition, the meal plan is only valid during term time not holiday periods such as Easter and Christmas. If you choose to live in the Vale, it is not compulsory to have the meal plan. If you do have it, it is likely that everybody in your flat will also have it, which means that meal times become a nice social event.



Vale Village



Pritchatts Park – Oakley Court



Selly Oak – Jarratt Hall

Having lived in the Vale, you will have a very pleasurable student experience and it will help you integrate in British Culture.

#### Pritchatts Park and Selly Oak

- ❑ Ashcroft
- ❑ Oakley Court
- ❑ Pritchatts House
- ❑ The Spinney
- ❑ Pritchatts Road Houses
- ❑ Jarratt Hall

At Pritchatts Park and Selly Oak, you do not have the option to join the meal plan. They also tend to house more international students and you may not necessarily experience the British social culture. However, both are cheaper and closer to the main University Campus than the Vale Village.

#### Private accommodation

- ❑ private student halls
- ❑ houses and apartments

The first thing to take into account is that private accommodation does not belong to the University but to a private landlord or an association. Rental costs will vary but you may find private accommodation more affordable. The University can provide support services such as SHAC which can help you find private

accommodation [www.guildshac.co.uk](http://www.guildshac.co.uk) and if you experience any problems the ARC which offers free legal advice [www.guildofstudents.com/thearc](http://www.guildofstudents.com/thearc)

Be aware that you may also be required to pay the full amount of your contract in advance if you do not have a UK guarantor.

*You can find links to all University Accommodation at [www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/accommodation/halls/index.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/accommodation/halls/index.aspx) which also include the following:*

- 360° view of the accommodation rooms (bear in mind the size of the room!)
- University accommodation prices
- Exact contract dates (because it is not for a whole year)

# Making friends

Coming to the UK for the first time might seem scary – don't be worried. **There are many ways for you to make friends!**

Coming to the UK for the first time might seem a bit challenging and scary – don't be worried! Make the most of social media where you can make friends before you even arrive. Search your Hall of Residence Facebook Page and add yourself so that you can virtually meet your future flatmates in advance. If you choose to live off-campus, you should join the FOCSOC (Freshers Off Campus Society) Facebook group to get involved in social activities. Your Hall of Residence is the starting point for making lots of British and fellow international friends who will also be attending the events listed in your Freshers pack. We recommend that you arrive for the Welcome Weekend and don't miss out.

The friends you make during Freshers week will be your buddies throughout your University life. It will also be one of your most memorable weeks. During this week, you will have no academic stress, so use your proactive skills and take initiative in taking part in social events. Attending the welcome week events organized by the International Students' Advisory Service (ISAS) is highly recommended, especially the Afternoon Cream Tea events and the International Welcome Receptions. Attending the sports and societies fair is essential, grab a booklet so that in your own time you can choose the societies which correspond with your personal interests.

The most influential friends are likely to be your course mates, so attend your course induction session which will enable you to get acquainted.

Of course, if you feel a little homesick – almost all cultures at the University have their own national societies where you can meet students from your home country. They also organise pub and bar socials as well as big international events where different cultures mix together. As a result, you can always find like-minded people to exchange ideas and enhance your cultural awareness.



# Money matters

Everyone will develop their own way of managing their money, but **here are a few tips** we have picked up to get you started.

## Budget your money!

You have access to limited funds over the course of the year and you might find that University life means you are spending the money in your bank account quickly. You ought to be strict with your spending, I was and it helped a lot. I devised a budget that consisted of mobile costs, utilities, groceries, socialising, travel and miscellaneous expenses. If you are living in private accommodation, you may have additional bills such as paying for gas and electricity, water rates and the internet. The best way to manage this is to set up a direct debit with your bank so that payments are made on time. You don't want to get charged unnecessarily for late payments.

If you plan to live in private accommodation, you may receive a bill for council tax from the Birmingham City Council but do not panic. As a full-time student, you are exempt from paying council tax. All you have to do is call the Birmingham City Council directly and tell them that you are a full time student at the University of Birmingham and you're seeking a council tax exemption.

Visit <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/studentservices/enquiries/council-tax.aspx> for further information.

You will receive a bill to pay for a TV licence at your accommodation which you are required to pay if you plan on watching TV. However, if not then telephone the number indicated on the bill to explain that this is not the case and therefore, will not be charged for a TV licence. Be honest when responding to the bill as it is a legal requirement to obtain a TV licence if you own a TV, don't be alarmed if the TV agency visit your accommodation to check for themselves.





In terms of shopping for groceries and living essentials, shops on campus are good but tend not to have lots of products so go to the big supermarkets around your neighbourhood. It would be wise to put money together as a group with your flatmates to buy communal essentials such as toilet paper, kitchen towels and detergents. I also shopped online at big supermarkets with my flatmates and shared the delivery charge. When I have to go to the city centre, I always share the taxi fare fixed at £6 one-way (from the Vale).

### Employment

Do you want to improve your skills and enhance your CV by gaining work experience? The University of Birmingham offers a great variety of resources to help. Go to the JobZone for information on off-campus jobs and Worklink for on-campus jobs at the Guild of Students or Careers Network for long-term employment opportunities in the University Centre. Book an appointment with a University Careers Advisor to help you with your CV and cover letter. You can always research through many other useful careers websites such as RateMyPlacement [www.ratemylacement.co.uk](http://www.ratemylacement.co.uk), Jobrapido [uk.jobrapido.com](http://uk.jobrapido.com) and Milkround [www.milkround.com](http://www.milkround.com)



Gaining voluntary experience is highly beneficial, ask for guidance from the Guild of Students or visit websites such as vlnspired [vinspired.com](http://vinspired.com). Check the University website regularly for updated information on job and work experience fairs including taster days with diverse companies and mentoring programmes. Thanks to the resources available, I was able to participate in many focus group meetings, work as a part-time fundraiser and much more. By doing so I gained hands-on experience and financial independence, priceless life experience and met diverse people off-campus.

## Insurance

You can never be too sure of your health, personal belongings or travel issues. I would tell you to be careful but you should rather be prepared. I purchased an annual health insurance plan for my time in the UK, it covers medical emergencies and I can simply claim any money I spend in case of an emergency. If you are the proud owner of thousands of pounds worth of personal belongings such as

computers, laptops and mobile phones, it is your own responsibility to organise insurance which covers the loss and damage of your belongings inside your home. As an international student, you may be travelling quite a lot to and from the UK, it would be wise to also obtain travel insurance to protect your belongings in transit. Keep in mind that the price of insurance varies, shop around and know your options.

Check online at [www.studentbeans.com](http://www.studentbeans.com)

## Top 'Budget' Tips

- Most supermarket chains have their own branded products usually called 'value' or 'basics'. These products are considerably cheap compared to top food brands.
- Some restaurants have food and drink offers with loyalty cards.
- Carry tea bags or coffee sachets with you as many coffee shops provide hot water and milk at a small cost.
- Make packed lunches, you can heat up your food in shops around campus.
- Buy the NUS Extra card from the Guild of Students during Freshers week. You can check out the range of discounts available across outlets countrywide at [www.nus.org.uk/en/nus-extra/discounts](http://www.nus.org.uk/en/nus-extra/discounts)
- If you decide to go to a night club, take an allocated amount of money and leave your bank card at home to avoid overspending.
- Remember you are a student, take advantage of student discounts and look out for offers when shopping.
- Sign up to student websites like [www.studentbeans.com](http://www.studentbeans.com) for advice on everything University.
- If you need extra help, the Guild of Students offer money advice and support when you need it.

# Becoming an independent learner

Once you have settled in to your new academic life here at the University of Birmingham, the support services available to you will help you become an independent learner!

## English for International Students Unit (EISU) and Academic Skills Centre

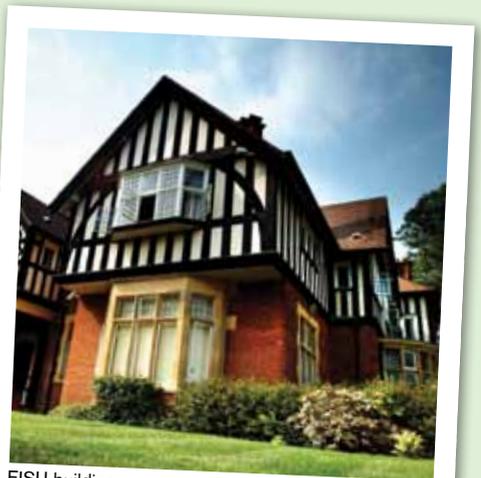
English may not be your first language in your home country, it can feel slightly overwhelming when expressing your own ideas in English. Fortunately, the EISU offers basic English classes that will help build your confidence. The tutors are very helpful and provide step-by-step guides on how to get used to writing and reading essays at University level, making it much easier to settle into academic life. Additional services include one to one checking of essays and free books including dictionaries and leisurely reading.

If you are bringing your partner as a dependant and looking for English support, the EISU offers English training for dependants of international students also at a reasonable cost. EISU is literally the perfect place to find help with your English language skills.

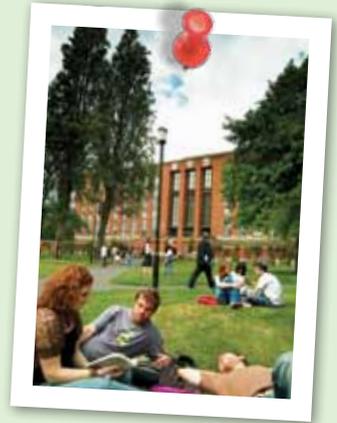
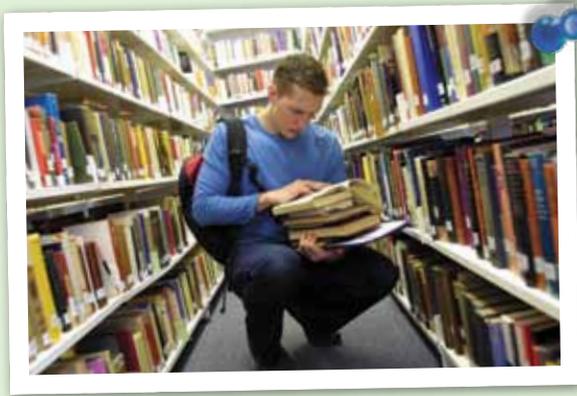
The Academic Skills Centre offers classes to support and improve your mathematics, statistics and academic writing.

## Personal Tutors

During the first month of my studies, I was assigned a personal tutor who acted as my mentor, they had both knowledge and experience in the field of my studies. They will conduct an academic and transition review to ensure that you doing well and outline ways in which you could improve whilst also settling in to your new environment in Birmingham. Meetings with my personal tutor provided guidance, set a personal career path and helped me find my strengths.



EISU building



### IT

WEBCT is an IT system that you are going to become familiar with during your University life. This is where you will find your lecture notes, your University emails and will grant you access to past exam papers to help you prepare for your exams. One thing you must always remember is that things can happen and change without warning such as room changes or rescheduled lectures and exams, your University email is your life. We recommended that you add your University email account to your phone and ensure you can access it on your laptop, check your emails daily.

If you experience any problems with your computer or laptop, the Guild of Students offer a FREE software to get your gadgets fixed unless spare parts are needed. Pop into 'Fix It' at the Guild of Students before you look anywhere else.

### Getting Good Grades

Achieving good grades will depend on your willingness to ask for assistance, discover what is expected of you and how the British academic system works. Academic learning and writing in the UK may be completely different to what you are used to in your home country.

When it comes to writing your essays, always make a record of the sources you have referred to. You could be accused of plagiarism if you cannot name a specific source used. Plagiarism is serious academic offence which has consequences and could prevent you from receiving your degree qualification. The University uses an IT filter called 'Turn It In' which scans your assignment to make sure you have referenced all sources. You will soon be on your way to a first class degree or distinction.

### The Main Library

The first thing you should do during your first week on campus is book a tour of the Main Library and become familiar with the facilities otherwise you may find difficulties navigating your way around and finding what you need, there are also specific areas for your own subject of study. The Main Library has computer 'clusters' which are spaces you can book in advance to study along with printing, scanning and photocopying facilities.

You need to remember that there are books labelled 'short loan' which you can only borrow for 24 hours, if you keep the book longer than 24 hours you will be charged 50p per hour.



Also, some books are available electronically (e-book). You may wish to buy a specific book for your main course but speak with your course mates first and share, this will help you save money. During exam periods, the Main Library extends its opening hours to 24 hours a day. You can even access other University libraries throughout the UK if you ask for a day pass when you visit.

*Remember, these services are here to help you:*

- English support at EISU
- Personal Tutor
- WEBCT
- 'Fix It'

### Study Skills and Resources

Work with your course mates to form study groups as soon as possible, you will gain more ideas and different perspectives. You will also act as support for one another and feel more motivated. There are many study facilities within the University where you could meet including the Main Library, your department, Learning Centre, The Guild of Students and many more. You are not restricted to your own subject area.

You can also benefit from the Student Mentoring Scheme whereby students in their second year can act as your mentor giving support and guidance in relation to academics, time management and how to succeed in your studies.



Guild of Students

# Getting around the city

Birmingham is the second largest city in the UK – **there is something for everyone** and various transport services to get around.

## Getting Around the City

Birmingham is the second largest city in the UK which means that it is easy to get to. During Welcome Weekend, book your airport collection whether it be Birmingham Airport or Heathrow Airport at [www.birmingham.ac.uk/welcome/international/travel.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/welcome/international/travel.aspx) as this will be the easiest way for you to get to your accommodation. If you miss your airport collection, there is no need to panic as there are alternative ways to reach campus. The University of Birmingham is the only University in England with its very own train station and therefore, the easiest and quickest way to get here is by train. Wherever you are, buy a train ticket to 'University Station' you'll find yourself in the middle of our campus. You can also get to campus by bus or taxi but this tends to be more expensive, time consuming and complicated.

You will find purchasing a railcard extremely beneficial as you will most likely find that you will travel by train more than any other transport services. Even if you're over 25 years old, you can still get a 16–25 years-old rail card. This card gives you a big discount on most train tickets. It's definitely worth it if you plan on commuting or travelling throughout the UK. All you have to do is fill out the application from the train station and get your departmental secretary to stamp

the application, indicating that you are a mature student. See [www.16-25railcard.co.uk](http://www.16-25railcard.co.uk) for more information.

Getting to Birmingham City Centre is really easy, it is only a 5 minute train journey from University Station to Birmingham New Street. You should definitely invest in an annual railcard to gain a discount, you have the option to buy a 3 year railcard and receive the third year absolutely FREE. Students at the University generally prefer travelling by train but be aware of off peak and peak travelling times if you do not purchase a railcard.

## Things to do in Birmingham

As Birmingham is such a big, culturally diverse city, it has something for everyone. Take advantage of student discounts at local cinemas, theatres and museums.

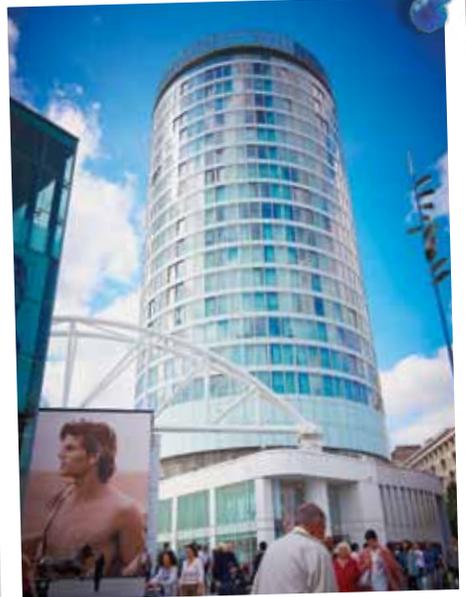




All you have to do is show your student ID card, carry it with you at all times, you never know when you might need it. You are likely to find a lot of students hanging out at The German Market during the Christmas period, Cannon Hill Park when the sun is out and also China Town. Whenever I am craving food from home I go to the indoor market in the City Centre where they sell foods from all over the world.

*As with every big city, you should always use your common sense when visiting the City Centre. Be safe!*

Birmingham also has a great nightlife! There are a lot of dance clubs on Broad Street like Gatecrasher and if you like live music, visit the Jam House at the Jewellery Quarter. It is very popular because admission is free before 9.00pm. But don't worry you don't have to be a party animal to have fun in Birmingham. There are a lot of nice and cheap restaurants that have special offers for students. The Comedy Society (it's called Footnotes) also organises stand-up comedy events each term where students perform with admission of only £4. If you're brave and consider yourself funny you can join in too. During the end of the summer term, we organise our own music festival called Vale Fest. It takes place after exams and it's a great way to relax after weeks and weeks of revision. If you form a band during your first year, you could also perform at Vale Fest.



# Health and safety in Birmingham

When moving away from home, you may find yourself responsible for your own wellbeing such as cooking your own meals.

## Health and Safety in Birmingham

When I first arrived at the University, many students were talking about Police Registration and I had no clue what it was but later found out that students of certain nationalities were required to register with the police within 7 days of arriving in the UK. You will know if you need to register with the police by checking the conditions on your visa. If your visa conditions state that you must report to the police shortly after your arrival, you will need to make your own arrangements to go to the West Midlands Police HQ in Birmingham. I would advise that you arrive 30 minutes before the doors open as it gets really busy, you may be turned away and asked to come back another day. You will require the exact Police Registration fee amount of £34.00. For further information please visit [www.west-midlands.police.uk/help-advice/overseas-visitor-registration/index.asp](http://www.west-midlands.police.uk/help-advice/overseas-visitor-registration/index.asp)

Don't forget, if you have any worries or enquiries regarding Police Registration or any other immigration related questions, log an online enquiry at [www.studenthelp.bham.ac.uk](http://www.studenthelp.bham.ac.uk) or visit the ISAS website at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/student-services/international/index.aspx>

Spare some time in your first week to register with a GP (Doctor) as soon as possible as your GP will be your first point of contact if you ever feel unwell. Remember, your registration with a GP is free but it does not cover eye examinations or dental care.

There are lots of social activities for you to try. You choose what you want to do. If you love a party like myself, I would strongly suggest that you eat a good sized meal before and after drinking alcohol, it will keep you energised the following morning and drink plenty of water to keep hydrated. For health and safety reasons and speaking from experience, do not cook after alcohol consumption, it's a bad idea. To be honest, I don't actually know how to cook, I generally eat pizzas and burgers on a daily basis. However, if you don't know how to already, learn to cook healthy meals as I was slim before I arrived the University, now I am becoming fat so make use of the University cooking classes 'Get Cooking' <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/student-services/projects/getcooking/index.aspx>. I like to organise regular dinner events at my home or at my friends place because it is a good way to learn about other cultures and try different types of food.



Keeping your health and fitness in mind, the University has amazing sports and fitness facilities where you can enjoy a wide variety of sports. There are many different sports and clubs to join online at [www.sport.bham.ac.uk](http://www.sport.bham.ac.uk). You don't have to take part in a sport or join a club to keep fit, you can also try walking or jogging around the campus, another great way to socialise with fellow students.

Always carry enough cash to travel to and from campus but if you ever find that you don't have enough money to travel, the University has an excellent scheme with Castle Cars. It is a special taxi service designed for University

of Birmingham students, the driver will take your student ID card from you which you can collect the following day from the Guild of Students as you pay for your taxi fare. It is a great service, you can find further information at [www.guildofstudents.com/accreditedtaxischeme](http://www.guildofstudents.com/accreditedtaxischeme).



Always remember to stay safe, make note of the University Security Services contact number; 0121 414 4444 and in a case of absolute emergency, call the Police on 999 from any phone. Keep your valuables in your front pockets and out of sight. Don't carry too much cash around with you.

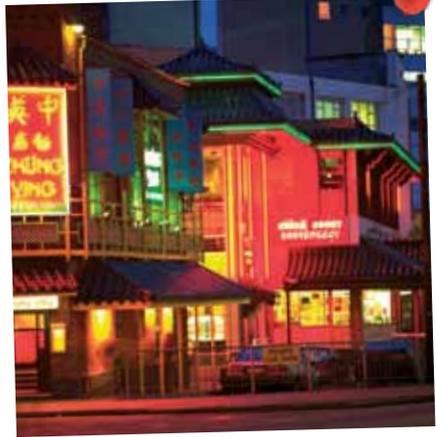
# Join a multicultural society

## Culture

Things may seem very different from your home country but Birmingham has everything you need to feel at home. You won't miss your food from home as you will find a restaurant in Birmingham which specialises in your native home food. However, you don't want to miss out on the famous British fish and chips, search your local fish and chip shop. Here in the UK, British people tend to go for dinner earlier rather than later and restaurants tend to stop serving food at 10.00pm so be sure to go out earlier than what you may be used to.

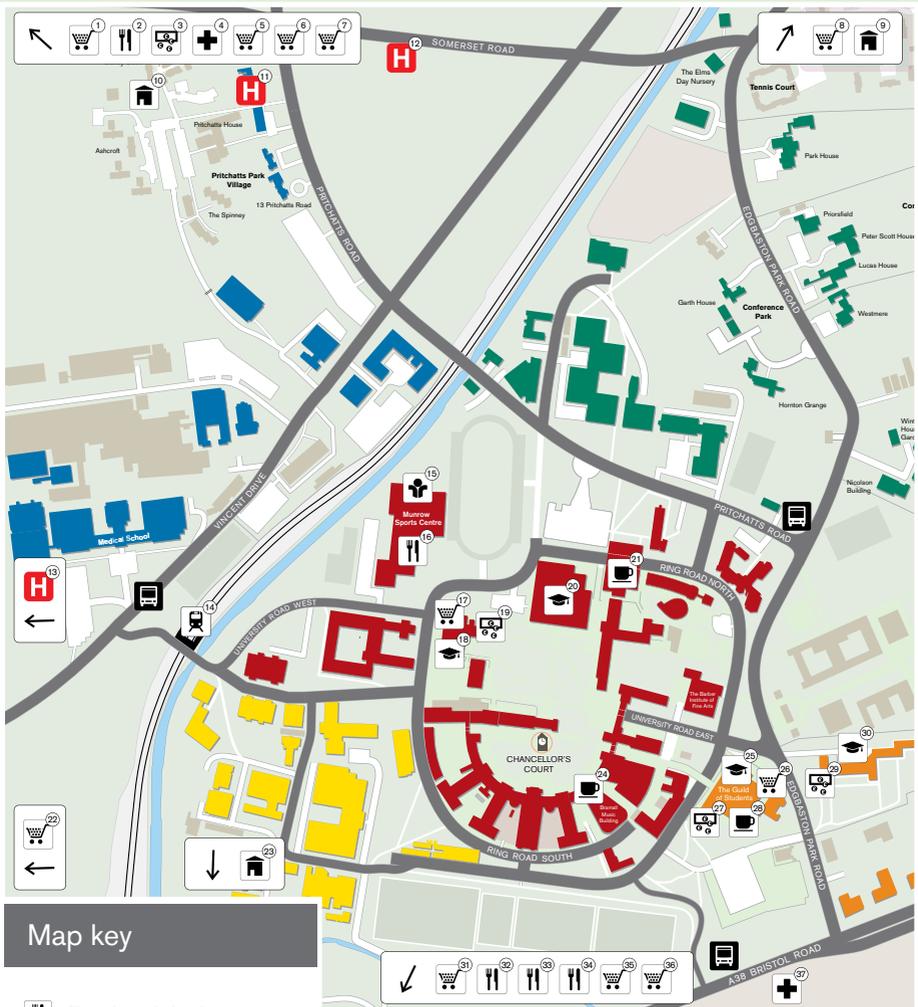
*Remember, vehicles in the UK drive on the left so be careful when crossing or even driving on the road for the first time.*

*Don't forget that the clocks change in March and October, you wouldn't want to miss a lecture.*



No matter what beliefs you may have, there is a huge range of faiths and are freely practiced in the UK. The University prayer rooms welcome all faiths with facilities to suit all requirements. In addition, the Guild of Students have many societies of different faiths which anyone can join to make new friends with those who have similar interests as you.





### Map key

-  Food and drink
-  University related  
Educational Institution
-  Sport facilities
-  ATM
-  Pharmacy
-  Bus stops
-  Cafe
-  Retail
-  Hospital
-  Accomodation
-  Rail

- 
-  31
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1. Waitrose
2. Zizzi's, Bounissimo, Pizza Express
3. Natwest, Lloyds
4. Boots Pharmacy
5. Home Bargains
6. Iceland
7. Marks and Spencers
8. Costcutter
9. The Vale
10. Pritchatts Park
11. Medical Practice
12. BMI The Edgbaston Hospital
13. Queen Elizabeth Hospital
14. University Train Station
15. Munrow Sports Centre
16. Raising the Bar restaurant
17. Spar
18. Careers Network
19. Natwest, Barclays
20. Library
21. Starbucks
22. Sainsburys
23. Jarratt Hall
24. Costa
25. Guild
26. Spar
27. Santander
28. Costa
29. Lloyds
30. Business School
31. Aldi
32. The Soak pub
33. Pizza Land
34. Indian Restaurants
35. Tesco Express, Seoul Plaza
36. Tesco Express
37. Lloyds Pharmacy

So in summary: what we're really trying to say is - relax, don't panic and be aware that there's lots of support if you need it.

Welcome to the University of Birmingham.

Enjoy it!

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

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