

Things to know before moving to the UK



The United Kingdom (UK) is one of the world's great economies and a very popular destination for expats, thanks to its high quality of life, rich history and diverse culture. At HSBC, our roots in the UK go deep, with our HSBC headquarters having been based in London since 1992.

Are you just doing some light research into a move or are you already several steps into your relocation? From opening a bank account to home loans and healthcare, this guide will give you some of the essential info you need for a successful start to life in the UK.



| Banking in the UK

Getting your finances in order is critical before you arrive in the UK. You will need to ensure you have enough funds to cover the cost of setting up your new home and getting connected. At HSBC, we're here to help you get all your banking needs taken care of so you get off to a smooth start.

How to open a UK bank account from overseas

Whether you're moving to live, work or study abroad, you will need a bank account so you can pay bills, receive your salary and have access to cash.

You can choose to open a local account, called a current account, after you've arrived. Alternatively, you may be eligible to open a UK bank account ahead of your move.

With HSBC you can open an overseas account in over 30 countries and regions (including the UK). You can do it online or through your local HSBC International Banking Centre before you move, or once you've arrived at your destination.

Credit and debit cards

Debit cards are widely used in the UK as a form of contactless payments. You also can withdraw, deposit, transfer and check account balances.

Will you need a credit card? Many offer consumer protection or even insurance services. Depending on the bank account you open, you may automatically qualify for a UK card.

Using a credit card wisely proves to lenders that you are a responsible borrower. Charging bills that must be paid monthly to your credit card (and then paying it off in full) is a great way to boost your credit score in a new country.

A higher credit score can result in preferential interest rates, larger home loans and the ability to secure deposits.

| Finding accommodation

When you arrive in the UK, you might be looking for a flat in the heart of the city, or a larger family home in the countryside. A handy tip is to speak to friends, colleagues and family members as soon as you arrive, and to visit local estate agents to see what's on offer in your area.



How to rent in the UK

Once you've found your perfect space, you'll need to sign a rental agreement with the landlord. These usually last for 12 months, and may require a minimum deposit of 1 month's rent. You can agree on a shorter tenancy but your landlord must allow you to rent the property for at least 6 months. As such, it's a good idea to ensure you have sufficient funds available to cover the cost of setting up your new home.

To start renting, you may need to provide proof of income and employment. Your landlord may also ask for references and conduct a credit check. It's worth remembering that you will most likely be responsible for your utility bills, such as gas and electricity, although water rates may be included in the rent. If in doubt, talk to your landlord.

Also, don't forget that you will need to pay council tax to your local authority each month. The amount varies depending on where you live and your personal circumstances. Living on your own or a full-time student? Your bill will be discounted, or you may even be exempt.

You can check the council tax band of a postal address in England or Wales with this [online calculator](#)

Top tip - If you have queries about your rental contract, you should seek legal advice. One of the best free resources in the UK is [Citizens Advice](#).

How to buy property in the UK

Before you start house hunting, think carefully about location and what's important to you. This will help narrow your search. If you're starting your search before you arrive in the UK, you might find it easier to go through an agent.

The most common way to buy a home is to take out a UK mortgage. You will need a solicitor or conveyancer to deal with the paperwork. Costs that you'll need to pay include legal fees, stamp duty and land registry costs.

Prior to your mortgage application, you'll need a Decision in Principle – also known as an Agreement in Principle. This will give you an indication of how much you can borrow to buy a property. A Decision in Principle is a type of soft credit check that will not impact your credit score.

| Immigration and taxes

Visas

No matter if you intend to work or study in the UK, you need to ensure all your documentation is in order before you head to the airport.

There are several types of visas available for people moving to the UK. If you plan on working over the long term, for example, you will need a Skilled Worker visa (formerly a Tier 2 General work visa). Other work visas include the Health and Care Worker, the Intra-company, the Start-up, and the Innovator visa.

If you'll be studying in the UK, selecting a visa category is straight-forward. The most common is the **Child Student visa**, which replaced the Tier 4 (General) student visa in October 2020, or the **Short-term study visa**. If you are over 18, in general you'll need to provide an unconditional offer letter, your current passport and proof that you can support yourself in the country.

International students graduating from a recognised UK university can now stay in the UK, unsponsored, and look for work for up to 2 years (or 3 years for PhD or doctorate graduates) through the **Graduate route visa**.

Whichever visa you choose, we recommend you start your research early and prepare all documents and fees in advance. Details of all types of work visas, as well as costs and required documents, can be found on the [visas and immigration page](#) of the UK government's website.

Identification

If you intend to stay in the UK longer than 6 months, you will need to apply for a biometric residence permit (BRP). This will include your name, date and place of birth, your fingerprints and photo, your immigration status, and whether you have access to public funds. Once you have your BRP, you can use it to prove your identity and your right to work or study in the country.

European Economic Area (plus Switzerland) nationals and Hong Kong British national Overseas (BNO) status holders can now easily verify their identification through the 'UK Immigration: ID Check' smartphone app.

National Insurance

All workers in the UK contribute to National Insurance each month, which is matched by their employers. National insurance grants you access to certain benefits, such as Jobseeker's Allowance, maternity leave and pension credit. Your eligibility and benefits will depend on your immigration status and how long you've lived in the UK. You will need to apply for a [National Insurance number](#) before you start working in the UK, so it's best to apply for yours as soon as you arrive.

Tax

If you work in the UK, you will need to pay income tax. This is handled by [HM Revenue and Customs \(HMRC\)](#), which is a department of the British government. If you are employed by a company, your income tax will be deducted from your salary each month. However, if you are self-employed you will need to complete a self-assessment each year to fulfil your obligations.



| Feeling at home

Getting connected

All communications in the UK are governed by an organisation called Ofcom. Currently, 95% of UK households have access to superfast broadband. And by 2025, the government is aiming for an 85% penetration of gigabit-capable broadband².

Find out more: www.ofcom.org.uk/home

Broadband - Much like its mobile phone providers, the UK has a range of internet service providers (ISPs), all offering different deals and levels of speed. Shop around - deals often include a landline connection and TV packages. When opening an account, most ISPs may ask you to provide proof of address, as well as a debit or credit card. Check with them directly when you apply as requirements may vary.

Mobile - There are plenty of mobile service providers in the UK. You may find it easier to get approved for a phone contract if you already have a UK bank account when you apply. Do you want the flexibility of a pay-as-you-go SIM card that you top up? If your mobile phone is unlocked and works in the UK, perhaps a SIM-only deal is a better option. Signing up for a contract is a great way to get a new handset, but your monthly payments will be higher.

Top tip - When shopping around for a mobile phone contract, it's best to bring along your:

- **debit or credit card**
- **proof of address**
- **passport**

National Health Service

The UK's National Health Service (NHS) offers free healthcare to all permanent residents. However, when you first arrive, it's unlikely that you will have access to free healthcare – at least not until you have contributed National Insurance and income tax. In the meantime, it may be worth taking out health insurance in your home country before you depart for the UK.

Top tip - Anyone living in England can [find a GP](#), register and consult with their local general practitioner (GP) for free.

Education

All children, typically between the ages of 5 and 16, in the UK are entitled to a free place at a state school. Schools follow the national curriculum, although there are regional differences between state schools in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and those in Scotland. You can also opt to educate your children at fee-paying schools.

When it comes to higher education, the UK is home to some of the oldest, most iconic universities in the world, with more than 150 institutions³ to choose from. Most undergraduate degrees are taught over 3 years in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and 4 years in Scotland.

Top tip - Check out [UCAS](#) or the [Complete University Guide](#) to find your perfect place to study.

| Wrapping up your first 3 months

We hope you find this guide useful in getting off to a great start in the UK. At HSBC, we're here to give you the right level of planning and support so you can make a success of the experience. Learn more about our [international services](#) to see how we can help.

Ready to open an overseas account?

We can tell you about the best way for you to apply. Select your current location and where you would like to open an account. We'll walk you through the steps.

[Apply now](#)

¹ [HSBC Who We Are](#)

² Gigabit-broadband in the UK: Government targets and policy. UK Parliament House of Commons Library

³ Higher education courses, www.gov.uk/higher-education-courses-find-and-apply