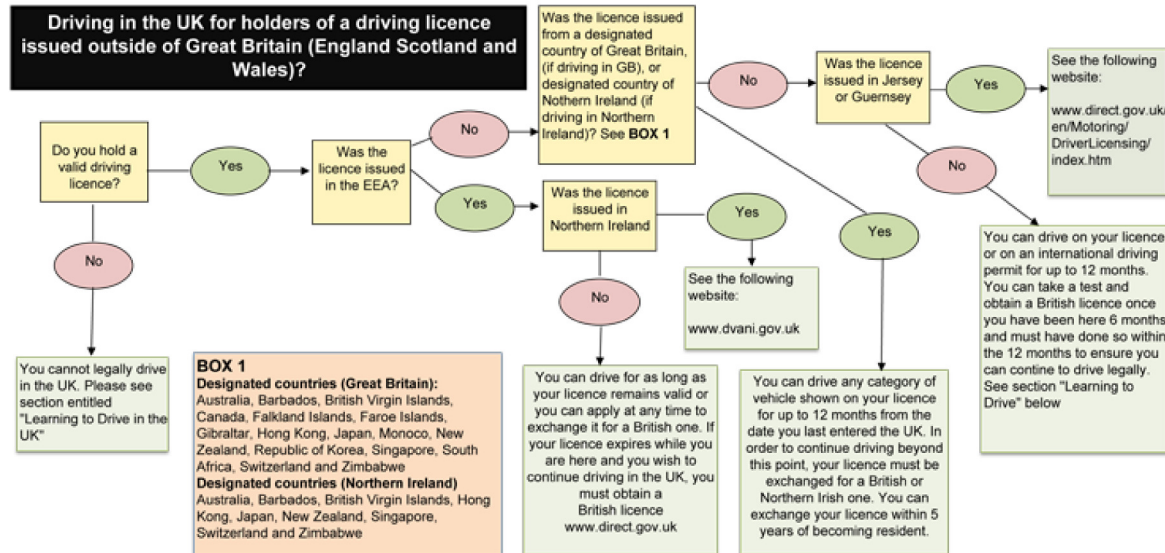


Driving in the United Kingdom: a guide for international students

March 2011



Introduction

Before driving any vehicle (car, motorbike, van etc) in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), you should check that you meet all of the legal requirements which apply (a) to the driver and (b) to the vehicle; and that you are aware of the correct procedures, which may be very different from your home country.

Note: It is a criminal offence to drive using a licence that is not valid in the UK. In addition, if you do so, your car insurance will be invalidated and you will be committing a further criminal offence of 'driving without motor insurance.'

Mopeds and Motorcycles

Even if you have a licence for driving a car, you might still need to complete a Compulsory Basic Training (CBT) course before riding a moped or a motorcycle in the UK. On successful completion of the course you will get a training certificate (DL196) which is valid for two years. You will need to show your certificate to the examiner when you take your practical test. If you have any queries about CBT phone the Driving Standards Agency on 0300 200 1122 and ask for the CBT Section or see '[Riding Motorcycles and Mopeds](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/LearnerAndNewDrivers/RidingMotorcyclesAndMopeds/index.htm)' at

<<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/LearnerAndNewDrivers/RidingMotorcyclesAndMopeds/index.htm>>.

Learning to drive in the UK

If you wish to drive a car in the UK but do not currently hold a valid licence to do so, you will need to apply for a provisional licence and take a driving test in order to obtain a full licence.

Driving licences are issued by the [Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority \(DVLA\)](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/DriverLicensing/DrivingInGbOnAForeignLicence/index.htm) in England, Scotland and Wales and in Northern Ireland by the [Driver and Vehicle Agency Northern Ireland](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/).

In Northern Ireland, those who do not hold a licence must have been studying there for at least 6 months prior to taking a driving test or applying for a full licence. For more information see www.nidirect.gov.uk/

In the rest of the UK (that is, England, Scotland and Wales), if you want to take a GB driving test, please see the following:

<www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/DriverLicensing/DrivingInGbOnAForeignLicence/index.htm>.

A provisional licence requires you to display red and white 'L'-plates ('D' plates in Wales) at the front and back of the vehicle and to be accompanied by another person in the passenger seat when you drive who (a) is over 21 years old, and (b) has passed their driving test and held a valid licence for at least 3 years.

You are not allowed to drive on a motorway if you hold a provisional licence.

See <www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/LearnerAndNewDrivers/index.htm>.

There are many driving-schools in the UK where you can pay for lessons with a qualified instructor. Details of instructors in your local area can be found in the Yellow Pages directory at <www.yell.com> or <www.driving-schools.co.uk> or <www.thephonebook.bt.com/publisha.content/en/index.publisha>.

Road traffic offences and immigration applications

If you are required to make an immigration application for permission to come to or to remain in the UK, the application form asks if you have any criminal convictions. You must declare, in the appropriate place on the application form, any 'unspent convictions'. The UKBA has published guidance on what is meant by 'unspent convictions' under its citizenship eligibility guidance www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/britishcitizenship/eligibility/goodcharacter/#. Please note that traffic offences (unless they are 'spent' or are fixed penalty notices which were not issued in court) must be declared.

Insurance

The law in UK requires all motorists to have valid insurance that provides them or anyone they permit to use the vehicle with insurance cover for the vehicle that they are driving. It is an offence to drive a vehicle on the road or in a public place without insurance, and penalties can be severe if you do not have insurance. There are 3 different types of insurance policies:

- Comprehensive (the fullest cover);
- Third Party, Fire and Theft; or
- Third Party only (the minimum cover).

If borrowing a friend's car or other vehicle, always check that they have insurance which allows you to drive it. If the car you are going to drive does not belong to you, then even if there is an insurance policy in force, it may not cover you to drive unless you are a named driver or it is an 'any driver' policy. However, even 'any driver' policies may not cover learner drivers, or people driving on foreign licences. It is the driver's responsibility to make sure that she or he is insured to drive. It is no defence (in law) to say that you believed (wrongly) that you were insured. Always check before driving.

For more information on arranging insurance for your vehicle, see the section below on 'Buying a car in the UK.'

If hiring/renting a car, you will need to show a valid current driving licence. Insurance and road tax are normally provided by the rental company and included in the hire charge.

It is illegal to drive without valid insurance, road tax or a valid driving licence. The penalty for doing this may be a fine, a ban or imprisonment.

On the road

In addition to having current valid road tax, insurance and a driving-licence, you must:

- drive on the left-hand side of the road and overtake on the right-hand side;
- wear a crash-helmet if you are riding a motor cycle or a moped;
- wear seat belts if you are the driver or front seat passengers must ; rear seat passengers must wear seat belts where they are fitted;

- not drive whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs;
- observe speed limits: 30 or 40mph (miles per hour) in built-up areas but some zones in towns and cities have lower limits, 70 mph on motorways and 60 mph on all other roads unless a different limit is displayed (e.g. 50);
- observe the minimum age requirements. Generally, these are 17 years for cars and motorcycles, 18 years for medium sized vehicles – for more detailed information see <www.dvla.gov.uk> or for Northern Ireland <www.dvni.gov.uk>.

Further information about what you can drive and your **legal obligations as a driver** can be found on the DVLA website at <www.dvla.gov.uk/drivers.aspx>. Essential reading for anyone planning to drive in the UK is The Highway Code, both in terms of road safety and because many of its rules are in fact legal requirements. **The Highway Code** costs around £2.50 and can be bought from bookshops or on-line at <www.tsoshop.co.uk> which also contains a 'Test Yourself' section.

Buying a vehicle in the UK

Legal requirements

All motor vehicles in the UK must be registered, taxed and insured. If the car is more than 3 years old, the car must be checked and a Certificate of Roadworthiness, known as an MoT Test, obtained every year before the expiry of the last MoT, which is valid for 12 months.

Registration

If you buy a brand-new car in the UK, the dealer will usually arrange for the car to be registered for you. You will need to provide documentary proof of your name and address. You must make sure that the details shown on your Registration Document/Certificate are correct. If the dealer does not register the car for you, make sure that they give you the appropriate application form so that you can apply yourself.

If you are thinking of buying a used ('second-hand') car or other vehicle in the UK, we strongly recommend that you read the helpful information entitled: **Advice on Buying a Vehicle** www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/BuyingAndSellingAVehicle/

Never purchase a vehicle unless it has a registration certificate. You may wish to make a check through the **DVLA'S Vehicle Check Service** (VCS) either online at <www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/BuyingAndSellingAVehicle/AdviceOnBuyingAndSellingAVehicle/DG_10014436> or by telephone. The VCS has been introduced to help reduce car crime. It is intended to deter criminals from disguising stolen cars with the identity of written off ones (that is, vehicles which have been badly damaged in an accident and which have been written off by an insurance company). The telephone service calls are charged at 49p per minute. The telephone number is 0906 185 85 85 and the service operates Monday to Friday between 8.00am and 8.30pm, and Saturday between 8.00am and 5.30pm.

For Northern Ireland, the number is 0845 402 4000 and the line is open Monday-Friday 0900-1700hrs (UK time); and there is useful advice on **buying a used vehicle** at <www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/motoring/buying-and-selling-a-vehicle.htm>.

Note: if you buy a vehicle which is later identified as having been stolen, you may have no right in law to its ownership and you could lose both the vehicle and the money you paid for it. For more details, see the DVLA website (link above).

When you have bought the vehicle, you will need to register it in your name. If you wish to bring your vehicle with you from your home country, then we recommend that you read the information on <www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/motoring/buying-and-selling-a-vehicle/importing-and-exporting-a-vehicle.htm>.

For Northern Ireland, see the **DVLNI** website at <www.dvni.gov.uk/vehicles/imports-exports.htm>.

For more information on **Vehicle Registration** see <www.dvla.gov.uk/vehicles.aspx> or for **Northern Ireland** see <www.dvni.gov.uk/dvni.aspx>.

Road Tax

You must ensure that road tax for your car is paid before you drive it. You can obtain a tax disc by completing an **application form (V10)** that is available from any Post Office and online at <

www.taxdisc.direct.gov.uk/EvlPortalApp/>.

You will need to take the completed form together with the following documents to a Post Office that issues tax discs:

- the Registration Document/Certificate (see above); and
- the certificate of insurance (see below); and
- a current test certificate of roadworthiness (MoT), if the vehicle is over 3 years old. The MoT test is available at most garages, but make sure that the garage is an approved MoT centre (it will display a sign which says this). The tax disc must be displayed in your car at all times. (Most people place them on the inside of the windscreen).

Insurance cover

The cost of motor insurance cover will vary according to a number of factors such as your age, how long you have been driving, where you are living, the age and value of your car and the type of car you have. Costs may vary widely between insurance companies for the same cover, so you may want to shop around.

Endsleigh Insurance at <www.endsleigh.co.uk> specialises in motor insurance for students (see address list). You will also find a wide range of insurance companies listed in your local telephone directory, or your bank or building society may have a close link to one.

If you intend to use your vehicle in Northern Ireland you must ensure that the insurance policy covers you for this in this area for the UK.

Motoring organisations

There are a number of motoring organisations in the UK that offer a range of services to the motorist, including breakdown assistance and recovery, insurance and route planning. They tend to charge a membership fee and make additional charges for the particular services you may wish to buy. You may find that NUS (National Union of Students) members get special rates from some motoring organisations. Examples of motoring organisations:

<www.rac.co.uk>
<www.theaa.com>
<www.greenflag.com>

Useful websites

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (England, Scotland and Wales)
<www.dvla.gov.uk>

Driver and Vehicle Agency Northern Ireland
<www.dvani.gov.uk>

Government information (including motoring)
<www.direct.gov.uk/Homepage/fs/en>

Endsleigh insurance
<www.endsleigh.co.uk>

Information sheets

- INF38 'Driving in Great Britain (GB) as a visitor or a new resident' at <www.dvla.gov.uk/media/pdf/leaflets/inf38.pdf>
- D100 'Driving licences' at <www.dvla.gov.uk/media/pdf/leaflets/d100.pdf>
- INF45 'Your photocard driving licence explained' at <www.dvla.gov.uk/media/pdf/leaflets/inf45.pdf>

These are available in Post Offices or from the **DVLA online leaflets** at <www.dvla.gov.uk/forms/onlineleaflets.aspx>.

© UKCISA

This information sheet may be printed and reproduced provided it is copied unaltered and in its entirety, including UKCISA's logo, disclaimer, copyright statement and the reference to UKCISA's website as a source of further updates, and provided that no charge is made to any persons for copies. **NO PART OF IT MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES.**

The information in this Information Sheet is given in good faith and has been carefully checked. UKCISA, however, accepts no legal responsibility for its accuracy.

-->