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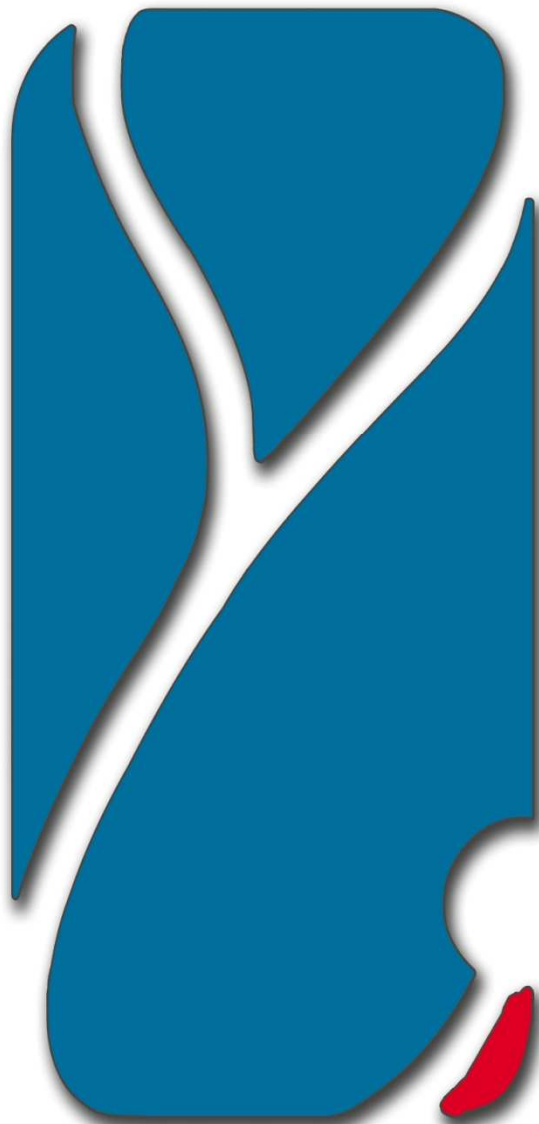
# Pre- departure guide

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A concise guide for  
students beginning  
medical school in the  
United Kingdom

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**SMSUK**  
SINGAPORE MEDICAL  
SOCIETY *of*  
THE UNITED KINGDOM



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*“Experience is one thing you can’t get for nothing.”*

*– Oscar Wilde*

## **Foreward**

As a university freshman bound for the United Kingdom, you are in a most enviable position. Before you lies the most exciting adventure you have ever embarked upon, one which few of your peers will ever experience, and one which will shape the rest of your life. Be warned, however, that the challenges you will face are neither few in number nor trivial in nature. The obstacles you have overcome thus far will pale in comparison to the trials ahead. Yet the prize is worth every sacrifice and the friends you make will be with you every step of the way.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the United Kingdom. Study hard, enjoy yourself, and never forget why you want to become a doctor!

Warmest regards,

Edward Ong

Editor 2011

Singapore Medical Society of the United Kingdom

## SMSUK.net

SMSUK.net is the online arm of Singapore Medical Society of the United Kingdom. We are a group of students (& alumni) who are studying Medicine & allied health programs in London. If you are one of us, come join us! Visit us at [SMSUK.org](http://SMSUK.org) or see the last page for event outlines.

### What happens after I get my offer?

If you have applied through UCAS, don't consider any offer received from a university college as official until you have received a letter from UCAS.

Track the progress of your application on <http://www.ucas.com> – click on “track progress”. There are 2 types of offers, conditional and unconditional. A conditional offer means that a university or college is offering you a place on certain conditions, usually that you get certain grades in your exams. An unconditional offer means that you have met all the entry requirements and the university or college is happy to have you on the course. The university or college will contact you if it needs proof of your qualifications. It may also specify any other requirements, such as financial or medical conditions, that you must meet or be free from before you can join the course.

If you're fortunate enough to get a few offers, make sure you decide carefully which college/university you prefer. Talk to seniors or approach any of the SMSUK members who might be able to direct you to someone whom you can talk to. Make sure you accept the offer! Read all the instruction on the UCAS website carefully.

Network and connect! Start to build up a network of new friends that are going to the same college or are already there. If you need any help, please liaise with your college's Singapore Society (visit <http://www.ukssc.org/> for more details). Check Facebook for groups of your future coursemates!

## Visa Applications

The visa application process may look difficult, but if you follow the online instructions, it should be a breeze.

Visas are issued by the UK border agency. Check their website (<http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/>) for the full checklist and online application.

In Singapore, admin and processing is contracted to VFS (<http://www.vfs-uk-sg.com/index.aspx>). Once you have finished the online application, check here for the steps and documents required. You will need to arrange for an appointment at the VFS office. Remember to bring all the documents, and make photocopies of everything!

## Opening a bank account

Major banks in UK include:

- HSBC
- Barclays
- Natwest
- Lloyds TSB
- Royal Bank of Scotland
- Santander

Make sure you weigh your options before setting up an account; for example, if you already have an account with HSBC, it may be easier to transfer funds to the UK.

Opening a UK Account – things you need:

- Passport
- Evidence of funds
- Acceptance letter
- Letter from accommodation office

You will be expected to pay for your tuition fees during enrolment, but try not to bring too much money when you first touchdown. Keep about 500 GBP with you to tide you over 2 weeks and quickly set up a bank account.

The 2 most common ways of depositing money into your bank account is through a bank draft addressed to oneself or telegraphic transfer. There will be a commission charge in the case of telegraphic transfer (TT)

## **Health Matters**

### **Medical Form**

Upon arrival in the UK, you may be required to go for a medical check-up before you are allowed through immigration. To expedite this, you can obtain a medical form from the British Council and do your check-up at your local Singapore GP.

### **Chest X-ray**

Have a chest x-ray film on your carry-on luggage. Try to get this done in hospitals or wherever convenient. Accept only a full-sized film (CDs and miniatures will be invalid).

### **Immunization Record**

All medical students will need to have up-to-date vaccinations with appropriate records. Your medical school should provide you with a full set of requirements. Note that lab tests done in Singapore may have to be redone in the UK due to accreditation issues, but you must still do them in Singapore first.

Bring along the blue health book (issued by Ministry of Health). A record of the immunizations you have received may be found on the last page.

Please note that Hep B vaccinations require 2 weeks between inoculation and serology, so get this done in advance.

## **Travel and transport**

### **Air travel**

Please book your air ticket at least 2 - 3 months before departure as tickets sell quickly during peak periods.

Look out for discounted fares, as airlines frequently do holiday deals. Return tickets bought in the UK may be cheaper, so always compare prices.

Remember to request for student air tickets, especially from SIA. They are cheaper and have more baggage allowance. Student air tickets may also offer a longer validity period. You may want to apply for an air miles membership so as to claim mileage and enjoy perks.

If you are going to UK for the first time, it will be best to arrive 1 week before your school term starts. During this time, you can settle into your new accommodation, sort out miscellaneous issues like bank accounts, & explore the city where you will be spending your next couple of years.

## Holiday travel

The Student Travel Association (STA) is an agency from whom you can purchase air tickets at student prices. You may also want to apply for an ISIC card in Singapore, from which you can enjoy discounts on airfares, movies, tourist attractions and book stores. The IYHC card is strongly recommended as it gives discounts on many hostels in Europe and the rest of the world.

## Getting to Central London

Plan your route in advance! Travelling from Heathrow (terminals are linked to underground) to central London by underground (tube) takes around 1 hour. See Transport for London website to plan your journey.

The Heathrow express is a dedicated train service that gets you to Paddington in 15 minutes. It is comfortable but a little pricey. Show your ISIC card to get discounts!

If you have lots of luggage, you can hail a black cab at the taxi stand. Note that this is VERY expensive. A trip to the city centre will run up to GBP60 or more. Try a minicab/radio taxi company such as Just Airports (<http://justairports.co.uk>).

Allow time to clear immigration. Assuming you have your health form, immunization record, chest x-ray, letter of acceptance from school and bank statements of your sponsor, clearing immigration should take anything from 1 to 1.5 hrs.

## Shipping

If you intend to bring a lot of items to UK, particularly foodstuff, it is best to ship them over as students are only entitled to a 30kg weight limit for luggage on the plane.

Send your parcel as early as 2.5 months before your arrival in UK as delivery might be longer than the 4-6 weeks often stated. Pack your items well with bubble wrap, foam packaging etc. Tissue packets are very useful fillers as they are expensive to buy in the UK!

If you intend to airlift your parcels, it is possibly cheaper to use DHL or UPS rather than SingPost.

It is important to know where to send your parcel to. You can send it directly to your hall but remember to inform them beforehand. Alternatively, you can always approach your seniors or the various SMSUK school reps.

Some useful websites:

[www.singpost.com.sg](http://www.singpost.com.sg)

[www.dhl.com](http://www.dhl.com)

[www.ups.com](http://www.ups.com)

[www.fedex.com](http://www.fedex.com)

## Things to bring

### Textbooks

Textbooks (in general) are cheaper in Singapore, but direct delivery from Amazon to your UK accommodation is also a viable option. Each school has its own curriculum & specific reference books. Thus, please consult your seniors before making any purchase.

As a rule of thumb, only buy the essentials in Singapore. These include physiology and anatomy textbooks. As the course progresses, you will have a better understanding of your textbook requirements, and can tailor your purchases to your study style.

SMSUK is organising a textbook resale programme, so watch for emails from us with the details.

### Packing list

- Documents for entry into the UK (pack in your hand luggage)
- Passport and visa
- Exit permit for NSmen
- Financial Statement of sponsor, sponsors letter and proof of sponsorship
- Acceptance letter from university
- Accommodation letter
- Hep B blood test results
- Medical Check-up form from British Council, Chest X-ray film
- Details of previous vaccinations
- Photocopies of all documents
- Textbooks, stationery
- Computer/laptop
- Alarm clock
- Clothing (you will have plenty of time to shop in the UK, so don't overdo it)
  - Underwear
  - 1 to 2 good warm jackets
  - T-shirts, polo tees, long sleeve tops
  - Jeans, trousers
  - Formal clothes
  - Footwear (formal, informal, flip-flops)
  - Sportswear
- Lip gloss & moisturizers
- Contact lens solution + spare spectacles
- Feminine hygiene products
- Essential medication (inhaler, anti-histamines etc.)
- Backpack
- Rice cooker (optional)

## Things to get when you arrive

### Mobile phone and contract

Most mobile phone providers bundle a free phone when you sign a contract with them. Contracts range from 12-18 months. If you are not a heavy user, consider getting a prepaid SIM card instead. Shop around for the best deals to fit your budget and usage patterns. Some websites compare the best deals of all the providers, it will be worthwhile to check

[www.vodafone.co.uk](http://www.vodafone.co.uk)

[www.o2.co.uk](http://www.o2.co.uk) (used by most Singaporeans)

[www.orange.co.uk](http://www.orange.co.uk)

[www.t-mobile.co.uk](http://www.t-mobile.co.uk)

[www.three.co.uk](http://www.three.co.uk)

### Essentials

2. Bed sheets, duvet, pillow cases (if not provided)
3. Crockery, plates, bowls and utensils

Check out [Argos.co.uk](http://Argos.co.uk) (which generally does good deals for almost anything it has on its catalogue), Woolworths, Smith Brothers, Primark, Roseby's or BHS. If you have a slightly higher budget, try John Lewis, Debenhams or any of the other high street departmental stores.

## Postscript

The SMSUK committee hopes that this pre-departure guide has been useful to you. If you have any questions pertaining to studying in the UK, especially in the area of medicine & the life sciences, don't hesitate to contact us.

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All the best in your future endeavours!

SMSUK14th Committee 2011/2012

Visit us at <http://SMSUK.org>