Opening a bank account in the UK

A guide for international students

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The information contained in this leaflet is accurate at the date of publication (August 2019). The University cannot accept responsibility for changes affecting the contents which arise after August 2019 or for errors in the original source material.

This document is intended as a guide only. The University is impartial and cannot advise students which is the best bank to open an account with.
1. Why do I need a UK bank account?

Many students decide to open a UK bank account because it is an easier way of accessing money while in the UK. If you withdraw money from an overseas account, you might be charged high fees for withdrawing money. It is also easier to pay for certain UK-based services (for example, your mobile phone and other day-to-day purchases) online using a UK bank account.

Having a UK bank account is also more secure than withdrawing large amounts of cash to keep in your University residence or private accommodation. We do not recommend that students do this.

Some students receive a scholarship from the University of Bristol to help cover living costs while they are here. The scholarship money needs to be paid into a UK bank account, so if you are due to receive a scholarship you should set up a UK bank account as soon as possible.

2. When can I open an account?

Before you open a UK bank account, you must be a fully registered student at the University of Bristol. This means that you must attend orientation/registration before you can get a bank letter or attend an appointment at a bank. See section 6 for more information about bank letters.

However, you can start getting ready before you are registered. You can make sure you have the necessary documents, research bank accounts and, if you are already in Bristol, call or drop into a bank branch to make an appointment. Once you have completed University registration, you can get a bank letter and attend your bank appointment.

3. How long does it take to open an account?

Opening a UK bank account can take some time, and you may have to wait a couple of weeks for an appointment to set up your account. Some accounts can be opened quickly (i.e., in less than 48 hours) but others may take longer, particularly during busy periods such as September.

You should therefore ensure that you have enough funds available for your first two weeks in Bristol (in a form such as travellers’ cheques or banker’s drafts). Do not bring a lot of cash with you, as there is a risk it could be lost or stolen.

Some banks will provide your account details (sort code and account number) before they send you your bank card. Your account is active as soon as you receive your account details.

For some banks, you can apply to open an account online rather than making an appointment.
4. How do I decide which bank to choose?

You will need to decide which bank you want to open an account with before requesting a bank letter from the University.

There are several major banks near the main University of Bristol precinct. There are differences in the type of services that each bank offers, as well as different requirements for every bank account, so be sure to read the brochures and online information from the banks carefully before you make your final choice. If the length of your studies is shorter than one year, you will have a more limited choice.

See section 10 for a list of some of the banks you can choose from and the most commonly used student accounts, along with information about who may be eligible for each of them.

Do I have to get a student account?

You don’t have to get a student bank account. There may be some basic accounts available that are not specifically for students, and these may also be appropriate for you.

Remember to check all the details, such as whether there is a monthly fee, whether online banking is available, whether you can transfer money and whether you can withdraw cash from different banks’ cashpoints for free.

Can I get a Sharia-compliant account?

Most banks will offer Sharia-compliant bank accounts. Please contact your preferred bank for further information.

Can I get an account if I am under 18?

Most major banks will offer bank accounts for under 18s, but they may require your parent or guardian to act as a guarantor. Check each individual bank’s website for further details on terms and conditions.

5. What documents do I need to open an account?

What you require to open a bank account will depend on which bank and type of bank account you choose. Different banks might have slightly different procedures for opening an account, but they will all need to verify who you are and where you live.

You may find the following information helpful as general guidance about what you may need to open a UK bank account.

- You should bring proof of identity, such as your passport or EU national identity card.
- If you have a visa, you must present your visa or BRP card when opening an account.
- You will need a bank letter from the University. See section 6 for more information about bank letters.
- You should bring proof of your student status. The most common form is your bank letter, although some banks will accept a student card.
• Most banks require proof of both your UK address and your residential address in your home country. Normally, your bank letter is sufficient because it shows your UK address and your home country address. However, different banks may require different documents as proof of address.

• If you are a pre-sessional student, you must present your conditional offer of further study at the University of Bristol (full-time course starting in September).

• Some banks require a minimum deposit to open certain accounts or a monthly fee. Some accounts also require you to maintain a minimum balance in your account. It is your responsibility to check these fees and requirements before opening an account.

6. How do I get a bank letter?

Before you get a bank letter

• Register as a student
  Only registered students can get a bank letter, so you will need to wait until after you have attended University of Bristol registration.

• Check your details are correct
  Your name on the bank letter must match your name on your passport or ID card, including the exact spelling and name order.

  It is also important to spell your address correctly when you complete the first stages of online registration, as this information will show on your bank letter. Banks will generally reject bank letters if your address is spelled incorrectly.

  It is very important that your Bristol term-time address is listed on your Student Info record. You can update this yourself once you’ve registered.

  If you live in private rented accommodation, the University will only give you a bank letter if you have a tenancy agreement (a contract between you and the person who owns the house). You can update your home and UK term-time address on the Student Info website.

• Choose your bank and branch

How to request your bank letter

This depends on your course and faculty, and when you arrive in Bristol.

• Pre-sessional students
  You will be able to fill in a form to receive a bank letter during Welcome Day.

  After Welcome Day, you will be able to request a bank letter from the Centre for Academic Language and Development reception.

  Due to the large numbers of letters required, it will take a few days for the bank letter to be ready. Staff at the Centre for Academic Language and Development will let you know when and where to collect the letter.
• **International Foundation Programme students**

You will be given a form to receive a bank letter during your Welcome Talk. Once you have completed the form, staff at the Centre for Academic Language and Development will let you know when and where to collect your bank letter.

After this, you will be able to request a bank letter from the Centre for Academic Language and Development reception.

• **Study Abroad and Erasmus+ students**

During Welcome Week in September or January, you can get a bank letter from the International Welcome Lounge.

After that, please email the Global Opportunities team at global-opportunities@bristol.ac.uk and they will advise you how to get the letter.

• **All other students**

If you are arriving in September, you will be able to request and collect your letter from the International Welcome Lounge.

If you arrive late, or at different point in the year, you will be able to request a bank letter from your Faculty Office. Please find the contact details for your faculty below:

- **Faculty of Arts**
  - Request by email.
  - Undergraduate students: artf-ugoffice@bristol.ac.uk
  - Postgraduate students: artf-pgoffice@bristol.ac.uk

- **Faculty of Engineering**
  - Request in person or by email. Find more information online.

- **Faculty of Health Sciences**
  - Request by email.
  - Undergraduate Students: med-dentregistration@bristol.ac.uk
  - Postgraduate Students: md-pgregistration@bristol.ac.uk

- **Faculty of Life Sciences**
  - Request by email.
  - Undergraduate students: fls-ugenquiries@bristol.ac.uk
  - Postgraduate students: fls-pgenquiries@bristol.ac.uk

- **Faculty of Science**
  - Request by email. Find more information online.

- **Faculty of Social Sciences and Law**
  - Request via the online shop. Find more information online.

If you are still not sure how to get your bank letter, email global-lounge@bristol.ac.uk including your student number in the email.

**Changes to your bank letter**

If there is information missing from your bank letter, or if something is incorrect or spelled wrong, we can issue you with a new version. Use the contact details above.

If you change your mind about which bank you want to choose, you will need a new bank letter. Use the contact details above.
7. Where can I get help if I have questions or problems?

If you start in September, you can speak to bank representatives during our two Bank open days. Staff at the International Welcome Lounge will also be available to answer your questions.

After Welcome Week, you can email global-lounge@bristol.ac.uk for advice.

You can find further information about UK bank accounts on these websites:

- British Bankers’ Association (BBA) guide for international students
- UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) guidance on opening a bank account.

8. Important information about bank accounts

- Keep your personal details and account details secret to prevent someone stealing your identity. Find out more about protecting yourself from identity theft.
- Only use a bank account for which you are a named account holder. You should not allow others to use your account to do their banking.
- Keep your bank statements. You will need these original statements if you need to extend your visa / leave to stay in the UK. Most banks charge a fee for duplicate statements, and it may take them several weeks to produce the documents.
- If you pay bills by direct debit, you must have the money in your account the day before the direct debit is due to go out of your account. If not, you could be charged penalty fees by the bank and by the company that is expecting to receive the direct debit payment.
- Do not go into debt on your account unless you have a pre-agreed overdraft facility with the bank.
- If your card is lost or stolen, you will need to notify your bank immediately to avoid any fraudulent transactions.
- Internet banking is generally very safe in the UK, but you should take the usual precautions with your password and login details. It is better to use your own personal computer for online banking, rather than a computer in a public space. Many banks will offer additional security measures such as a password generator device which you keep at home to generate a unique password each time you use internet banking. Banks will also provide demonstrations of such facilities online or sometimes in the branch to new customers.
## 9. Glossary of banking terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Top tips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Account number</td>
<td>An eight-digit number assigned to your account by the bank.</td>
<td>This can be found on the front of your bank card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashback</td>
<td>An amount of money that is added to your shopping bill and given to you in cash.</td>
<td>Some supermarkets or shops allow you to get cashback when you buy your groceries. They will give you cash from the till by adding the amount to your total shopping bill paid by debit card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash card</td>
<td>A type of bank card that allows you to take money out of your account using a cashpoint. This is usually a combined cash/debit card (see Debit card).</td>
<td>Also known as an ATM card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashpoint</td>
<td>A machine at a bank branch or other location which enables you to perform basic banking activities using your bank card (including checking your balance and withdrawing or transferring funds), even when the bank is closed.</td>
<td>Also known as an ATM (automated teller machine), cash machine, or hole in the wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheque book</td>
<td>A book of paper cheques, which allow you to make payments from your account.</td>
<td>Cheque books are not available for all types of account. Cheques are becoming a less common method of payment, and nearly all shops have stopped accepting them. There may be times when you need to write a cheque, for example when paying to join a sport or social club.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chip and Pin</td>
<td>A standard for bank cards which include an electronic chip used with a PIN.</td>
<td>When using your card in a shop, instead of signing a paper receipt to verify a card payment, you enter your PIN (see PIN).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Top tips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contactless</td>
<td>A payment system that allows you to pay for small purchases (usually up to £30) by tapping your card on a machine in the shop without needing to enter a PIN or sign for the purchase.</td>
<td>Many bank cards are now contactless as standard. Look for this logo:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current account</td>
<td>Your main bank account, from which you can withdraw money or make purchases (as long as there is a credit balance).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debit card</td>
<td>A type of bank card that you use to pay for your shopping. You can usually also withdraw cash from a cashpoint with a debit card (see Cash card).</td>
<td>The money is usually taken from your account immediately, so you must have the funds available in your bank account when you make purchases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct debit (DD) or standing order</td>
<td>A method of paying bills directly from your bank account.</td>
<td>You sign a form allowing the company you are paying to take the money directly from your account each month. If you go over your agreed limit, there are usually penalties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Identity papers such as your passport or EU national identity card.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overdraft</td>
<td>A facility allowing you to borrow money through your current account.</td>
<td>The bank will usually charge you interest and other fees for this service, if they agree for you to have an overdraft. Not all accounts come with an overdraft facility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIN</td>
<td>A four-digit number that you use to gain access to your account and use your bank card. PIN stands for Personal Identification Number.</td>
<td>Do not allow anyone else to see your PIN. When you get your bank card, you will also receive a letter containing your PIN; you should destroy the letter after you have memorised the number.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort code</td>
<td>A code assigned to a specific branch of a bank.</td>
<td>In the UK, sort codes are six digits long and have the format 00-00-00. This can be found on the front of your bank card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing order</td>
<td>See Direct debit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>Removal of funds from your account, for example taking out cash from a cashpoint.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Local banks comparison table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>Most common account for international students</th>
<th>Fee to open an account</th>
<th>Monthly fee</th>
<th>Cost of money transfers abroad</th>
<th>Address of local branches</th>
<th>Suitable for:</th>
<th>Study Abroad and Erasmus+ students?</th>
<th>Pre-sessional students?</th>
<th>Sharia law compliant?</th>
<th>How to open a bank account</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barclays</td>
<td><strong>Barclays Bank Account</strong></td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Online: free</td>
<td>Clifton: 86 Queens Rd, Bristol BS8 1RB&lt;br&gt;Broadmead: 55 Broadmead, Bristol BS1 3EA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Minimum length of study 2 years, or 1 year for postgraduates</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Online only: click ‘Apply sole’ and follow instructions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td><strong>Basic Account</strong></td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Outside EU: £9.50&lt;br&gt;Inside EU: free</td>
<td>Broadmead: 25/27 Broadmead, Bristol BS1 3HF</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Online: apply for Reward account, but as not eligible, application will switch to Basic account. By appointment: visit Broadmead branch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSBC</td>
<td><strong>Bank Account</strong></td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Online: £4</td>
<td>Clifton: 149 Whiteladies Rd, Bristol BS8 2RA&lt;br&gt;Cabot Circus: 62 George White Street, Bristol BS1 3BA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Clifton: email Peter Walters to make an appointment at <a href="mailto:peterwalters@hsbc.com">peterwalters@hsbc.com</a>, including dates when you are available. Cabot Circus: visit branch to make appointment. Up to five students can attend an appointment together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank</td>
<td>Most common account for international students</td>
<td>Fee to open an account</td>
<td>Monthly fee</td>
<td>Cost of money transfers abroad</td>
<td>Address of local branches</td>
<td>Suitable for: Undergraduate and postgraduate degree students?</td>
<td>Study Abroad and Erasmus+ students?</td>
<td>Pre-sessional students?</td>
<td>Sharia law compliant?</td>
<td>How to open a bank account</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyds</td>
<td>Classic Account</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>£9.50</td>
<td>Clifton: 58 Queens Rd, Bristol BS8 1RQ Cabot Circus: 44-45 George White Street, Bristol BS1 3BA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes If studying for under 6 months, 'This student is part of an exchange programme' must be written on the letter</td>
<td>Yes Visa must have 30 days remaining from the day you open an account</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Visit branch to make an appointment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NatWest</td>
<td>Student Account</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>£10</td>
<td>£10 to £30</td>
<td>Clifton: 40 Queens Rd, Bristol BS8 1BF Broadmead: 11 Broadmead, Bristol BS1 3HF</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Only if studying for minimum 1 year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Online only: no appointments available at Bristol branches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santander</td>
<td>Essentials Current Account</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>£1</td>
<td>£25</td>
<td>Clifton: 107 Whiteladies Rd, Bristol BS8 2PB Broadmead: 7-13 Merchant St, Bristol BS1 3EH</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Only if studying for minimum 1 year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Online. If you are having difficulties, go to the branch – staff will help you with the online application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSB</td>
<td>Classic Plus Account</td>
<td>£1</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Online: £10</td>
<td>In the bank: £20 Broadmead: 36-38 Merchant St, Bristol BS1 3EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Visit branch or call 0117 9211 782 to make an appointment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you are an International Foundation Programme student, please check eligibility with your preferred bank.