Irish School of Ecumenics, Belfast
Guide for International Students

2018-19
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Introduction

The Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) offers courses in two locations – at the main Trinity campus in Dublin, and in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The information you need as an international student coming to Belfast is very different than if you were preparing to study in Dublin, due to the UK location. This guide covers all you need to know from travel and visas to healthcare and housing. You can find contact details at the end of this document; please don’t hesitate to get in touch with any questions.

Non-EU Fee Status and Fee Payment

Eligibility for EU fee status is based on residency rather than nationality. If you will be paying non-EU fees it is useful to know in advance that you will be required to pay the full amount of course fees due at the start of your course. The option to pay in two instalments is only available to EU fee-paying students. Please see the Academic Registry Fees and Payments section for the full criteria.

Student Visas

**EU/EEA nationals**
If you are a national of the EEA (27 EU countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) or Switzerland you currently have the right of free movement and residence in the UK. There will only be a brief passport or identity card check on arrival. EU nationals applying for a course in the UK for 2018-19 will not see any change as a result of Brexit. If you would like to keep up to date with developments on this, the UK Council for International Student Affairs [UKCISA](https://www.ukcisa.org.uk) provides regular Brexit news for students.

**Non EU/EEA nationals**
If you are a non EU/EEA national you will need to apply for a Tier 4 UK student visa. You should apply from your own home country before you travel. Online application is via the new service [Access UK](https://www.accessuk.gov.uk). It is worth knowing ahead of time that this can be
an expensive and complicated process, but with up to date information and by starting in good time most students find they can navigate it without too many difficulties.

**When to apply**
You can begin the visa application process anytime in the 3 months before the start of your course. The start date that will appear on the documentation we provide for your visa application is Monday 27 August 2018, the official start of term. Therefore you will be able to apply for your visa anytime from the beginning of June. Classes start the week beginning 10th September – see page 5 for more information.

**What do you need to get a visa?**
The visa application is based on points: you get 30 points for having a CAS (confirmation of acceptance for studies, supplied by us) and 10 points for having enough money to cover your first year’s fees and up to 9 months living expenses. Fees can be found on the [College Academic Registry website](https://www.tcd.ie) and living expenses are worked out at £1,015 per month for any region of the UK outside London. Although documentary evidence is not always requested for some nationalities such as US and Canadian students, you will need to be ready to show evidence you have had the required amount available in a bank account for around a month before you apply for your visa, in case it is requested; a letter confirming your student loan or scholarship is also accepted as evidence of funds that will be available to you.

**Your CAS**
To obtain your CAS number, once you have **accepted a firm offer** of a place on the course, please send a scan of the photograph page of your passport to the MPhil office at reconsec@tcd.ie. We will send you a PDF document with your CAS number and other information about the course which you may need for your visa application. The CAS is valid for 6 months.
To speed up your visa application UKVI offers the following advice:

- Submit any supporting documents either with your application or shortly after in a timely manner;
- Enrol your biometrics as soon as you receive your enrolment request;
- Ensure you complete the Immigration Health Surcharge along with your Tier 4 application; and
- Use the Immigration Health Surcharge fee checker to understand the required payment.

**Healthcare Surcharge**

As referred to above, students are required to pay a Healthcare Surcharge, currently £150 for each 12 month period, as part of the visa application. This entitles you to use of the National Health Service for the duration of your stay in the UK as a student. Please note that students applying for a 4 year visa to undertake a PhD will need to pay the full amount in advance. Any dependents are also required to pay the healthcare surcharge and they will need to submit a separate visa application.

**Start of term dates and orientation**

Orientation for the MPhil course will take place in Belfast on 10th September at the start of the first teaching week of term. Attendance is required. All Dublin orientation events are optional. However, you will need to travel to Dublin to collect your student ID card, so Belfast students often choose to combine some Dublin Orientation events with collecting their card. For example, orientation at ISE in Dublin is a good way of meeting students in the wider school. We will let you know exact dates as these are confirmed and will also help you connect with other Belfast students before the start of term, so those who wish to can arrange to travel down to Dublin as a group. Look out for the updated Key Dates document on our website.

**When should you plan to arrive?**

Your student visa should allow you to arrive up to a month before the start date of 27 August on your CAS which gives you time to settle in and find your feet before study begins. The visa usually includes a 4 month stay in the UK after your studies. It
is advisable to arrive in Belfast at least a couple of weeks before classes start to allow for time to find housing. For any late applicants to the course who are applying for a visa in a tight timeframe, expedited services are available such as WorldBridge or Swift.

Travel to Belfast

How to get here

If coming from the US, you are likely to travel to Northern Ireland by one of three routes: a flight directly to Belfast with the new Norwegian Air service which started in July last year (New York and Boston areas to Belfast International); a flight to mainland UK (e.g. London, Manchester etc.) and a connecting flight to Belfast International or Belfast City Airport, or a direct flight to Dublin. Current students mentioned that US-Reykjavik-Belfast is also worth exploring.

At your point of entry into a UK airport an immigration officer may ask you to show evidence of your reasons for coming to the UK. This could include your CAS document from us and acceptance letter, travel tickets, passport, evidence of funding and your 30 day travel vignette. Spot interviews may take place. Whatever your chosen route you should carry the key documents in your hand luggage.

If you travel via Dublin

If you plan to fly into Dublin rather than a UK airport you should keep your travel documents as proof of your journey to the UK (as you won’t be arriving at a UK airport, your passport won’t be stamped). You will be arriving into what is known as the Common Travel Area and UKCISA has further information for UK-bound students arriving via Dublin.

Collecting your Biometric Residence Permit after you arrive in Belfast

When your leave to travel is granted in your home country, you’ll be given a 30 day vignette in your passport. This gives you permission to come to the UK and is valid for 30 days from the date you said you’d arrive in the UK (even if you arrive at a later
date). You will then need to collect your Biometric Residence Permit from the main Belfast Post Office in High Street, within 10 days of your arrival in the UK. You will receive a decision letter from UK visas and immigration (UKVI) telling you when your BRP will be available. You need to bring your passport or travel document with your vignette sticker when you collect your BRP. If you have problems picking up your BRP or if it contains any errors, you can find advice on the UKVI website.

**Bringing your documents to ISE**

You will need to bring your BRP and passport to ISE Belfast at the start of term as we are required to make a copy for our records. Usually we scan these at orientation and return them to you the same day. You will also need to provide your term time address and contact details once available and let us know of any changes throughout the year.

**Travel between Belfast and Dublin**

At the start of term you will need to travel to the main Trinity campus in Dublin, in the Republic of Ireland, to collect your student ID card. As part of the registration process you will be notified of the dates your card will be available for collection. (Please note you will need to have completed online registration before you can collect your card).

Students from certain countries may need to ensure that their UK student visa covers re-entry to the UK so they can legally travel out of Northern Ireland, to the Republic of Ireland, and back. Check with UK Visas and Immigration if you think this might apply to you.

To comply with Irish visa requirements, some nationalities will need a short visitor visa in order to make the journey to Dublin. These are issued by the Irish authorities. For more information on Irish visas see the Irish Embassy website. Such students are also likely to need to make sure their UK visa covers leaving and returning to the UK. Academic Registry will however make an exception for any student who cannot travel to Dublin and will arrange to post your ID card to Belfast.
All international students are advised to carry their passport, BRP and Trinity student ID card when travelling between the Belfast and Dublin as there are sometimes identity checks on public transport.

**Accommodation**

It is a student’s own responsibility to find accommodation for the year. To help you, in this section we provide advice on accommodation options on-site, other student accommodation in the area, which areas of the city are most student-friendly, and useful websites to help you get started on your housing search.

Current students recommend starting your search and making contact with agents ahead of your arrival, although it is worth mentioning that from September 2018 Trinity is starting two weeks earlier than Queen’s, the main university in Belfast, so this should give ISE students a head start on securing available housing.

If you would find it helpful to leave your luggage with us for a few days after arrival in Belfast, we will try to help you with this.

**Short term accommodation suggestions**

If you need somewhere to stay while you search for a place for the year, here are some options in South Belfast recommended by past students:

- [Arnies Backpacker](#) Fitzwilliam Street
- [Paddys Palace](#) Fitzwilliam Street
- [Lagan Backpackers](#) Fitzroy Avenue
- [Global Village](#) University Street
- [Vagabonds](#) University Road
- [Full list of Belfast hostels from Hostelworld.com](#)
- [Air B&B run by past ISE student](#) Ormeau Road area
**On-site accommodation**

The Irish School of Ecumenics is located at 9 Lennoxvale, off Malone Road, Belfast, BT9 5BY. [Click here for map](#). The campus is shared with Edgehill Theological College and is comfortable and well-equipped. Accommodation is available on-site, however this is limited and is available on a first come first served basis. You can apply for accommodation **after Easter**. As a guide, usually 2 or 3 ISE students opt for this and the rest find a place in the surrounding area, either in one of the accommodation blocks listed below or in a shared house. As the on-site accommodation is managed by Edgehill College, please contact the Edgehill bursar directly for more information: Wayne Mullholland [wmulholland@edgehillcollege.org](mailto:wmulholland@edgehillcollege.org).

**Student Accommodation open to students of any university**

Belfast now has several student accommodation blocks. All feature a range of attractive packages.

- [Queen’s University accommodation](#) – the Queen’s Elms option is a few minutes’ walk from us.
- [Botanic Studios](#) - Dublin Road, about 10 minutes’ walk.
- [Student Roost](#) located in various city centre locations.

**Private Rented Accommodation**

For a general search for student housing you could try the [Student Pad website](#). This lists private rental properties approved by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for students, so properties should reach a certain standard. As ISE isn’t listed as one of the campuses, search under Queen’s University, or under area: Belfast- Botanic, Malone, Stranmillis, Windsor and Ravenhill. Student Pad also has a useful [advice section](#).

**Choosing which area to live in**

There are lots of student friendly areas in south Belfast which are convenient for getting to ISE and where rentals are easy to find: Lisburn Road (also known as Windsor), Ormeau, Malone, Stranmillis, Ravenhill and Botanic. The area directly
behind Queen’s University known as ‘the Holylands’ is popular with undergrads and can be quite lively; for a quieter life you might prefer to avoid that area! Belfast is a relatively safe city on the whole. There have been some incidents of racism and hate crimes directed towards non-white immigrants, however there are plenty of areas where anyone will feel safe and welcome. We encourage you to contact us if you would like advice about a particular area.

**Other Useful Websites**

- Gumtree
- Property News
- Daft.ie (select Queens’ University Belfast as the nearest campus)
- Spare Room Flat Share
- City Lets
- Property Pal

For those interested in city centre apartment living, Mark Royal House is located across from St. Anne’s Cathedral in the Cathedral Quarter. ISE students have had good experiences there and report that the building is very secure with key fob access required to enter the building and to enter onto your floor and specific wing.

**Sharing with other ISE students**

In the weeks before term you will be invited to connect with other students and this gives you a way to contact others who might be interested in sharing accommodation.

**ISE Belfast Location**

Lennoxvale, off the Malone Road, is a short taxi ride from the main bus and train stations in the city centre. The Malone Road is also served by the number 8B and C Metro buses which leave from the City Hall. Hop off a couple of stops after Queen’s University and ISE is located at no. 9 Lennoxvale at the end of the cul de sac. See map at back of booklet. Once you have arrived in Belfast you are welcome to come
and make yourself known to the staff and ask any questions you might have. Mornings are best as the MPhil Executive Officer, Caroline Clarke, is there 9.00am – 1.00pm.

**Access to Money**

Please make sure that you have access to money to see you through the first few weeks of term in case of any delay in processing student loans.

**Working**

A Tier 4 student visa entitles you to work for 20 hours during term time and full time during holidays. You will need to **obtain a National Insurance Number**. You can search for work through the local press or online and it is sometimes possible to find bar or cafe work by dropping in your CV. Bear in mind that if you take the Community Learning module you will also have an internship to factor into your time in the second term. As ISE is a small department, unfortunately we cannot offer employment opportunities to students.

**Healthcare**

You can register with any doctor (GP) practice in the area where you are living for the year. We strongly advise that you do this once you have found your accommodation for the year so that it is in place in case you become unwell at a later stage. As we are quite far from the main Trinity campus, it will not be practical to rely on the college student health centre. You will need to make an appointment to register at the doctor’s surgery and take along your BRP, passport and evidence of your address. You will then be sent an NHS medical card with an individual identity code, which you can also use to register with a dentist. A consultation with your doctor is free, but you may have to pay for any medicines prescribed. You can find a factsheet with more information and lists of GPs on our [website](#).
Living Costs

UKVI estimates that you will need around £1,015 per month to cover living expenses, although you will find Belfast a little cheaper compared to the rest of the UK. UKCISA is again helpful for general information on student finances, and indeed, anything you might need to know about life as a student in the UK!

Currency

The currency used in Northern Ireland is the British Pound, sterling. The Republic of Ireland uses Euros. If you wish to get some Euros before you travel to Dublin, you can buy them at any Post Office or bank. The Ulster Bank beside the City Hall has a Euro ATM. On the train to and from Dublin you can use either currency. Trinity fees are calculated in Euros.

Opening a Bank Account

To open a bank account you will need your passport, BRP and a letter from us to confirm your student status and your term time address. Please request a letter from the Executive Officer at reconsec@tcd.ie when you are ready to open a bank account (once you know your term time address). Past students have recommended the new Santander branch at Queen’s University Student’s Union as being easy to deal with when opening a student account.

The Weather!

Northern Ireland has a mild, temperate climate. It’s rare to get extremes of hot or cold (especially hot...). Do bring warm clothing and a waterproof coat. Layers are best as the weather is always changeable.
Transport

Translink operates all local bus and trains services in Northern Ireland, making it easy to find information. The service within Belfast city is called Metro. Various smart travel cards are available to help you save money. Regular buses and trains run between Belfast and Dublin. The bus is cheaper but there are webfares available for the train if you book a few days in advance. Other Belfast to Dublin bus services are Aircoach and Dublin Coach. See maps at the back of this booklet for stations.

Shops

Here are some suggestions of shops where you can buy everything from pots and pans to duvet covers:

- Ikea – Holywood Exchange served by no 26 and 27 bus from city centre
- Argos – Castle Court and Rosses Court (near Victoria Square) and online
- B & M Bargains – Rosemary Street
- Dunnes – off Cornmarket

Course information & further guides on living in Belfast

More information about the course and a guide to Student Life in Belfast can be found on the ISE website. You can download our helpful checklist for international students, a healthcare factsheet and more.

Further Information on studying in the UK

UK Council for International Student Affairs
British Council
UK Visas and Immigration
Living in Dublin

The Trinity Global Relations Office provides information for International students who will be living in Dublin. Information on travel and Irish visas is available here.
Contacts

MPhil Office, Belfast

Caroline Clarke
Tel: +44(0)28 9077 0087 (9.00 am – 1.00 pm GMT)
Email: reconsec@tcd.ie

Academic Staff

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Course Coordinator
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Click here for map

Follow us on Twitter
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Watch School video and see the Belfast campus

Academic Registry is the central college office for application, fee payment and registration enquiries.
Tel: +353 (0) 1 896 4500
Email: academic.registry@tcd.ie
Maps

Irish School of Ecumenics, Lennoxvale, Malone Road

From city centre take the 8B or 8C bus which leaves from the City Hall near the Ulster Bank. Hop off after you see Fisherwick Presbyterian church on the left just past Queen’s university. ISE is the last building in the Lennoxvale cul de sac.
Post Office in High Street, city centre – collection point for BRP

Walk down Donegall Place, the main street opposite the front of the City Hall, and turn right at McDonalds. Post office is at the junction a short distance along on the left.
Main Transport Links

Translink coaches to Dublin, Dublin airport, Belfast International airport and Belfast City airport - Europa Bus Centre

Aircoach and Dublin Bus - Glengall Street, beside Europa Bus Centre

Trains to Dublin – Lanyon Place Station (formerly known as Central Station)