

student survival guide



Keeping People Safe

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Introduction

Welcome to the student survival guide

This guide exists to give you helpful reminders of things to watch out for during your time as a student and has been created with your safety in mind. The purpose of this information is to inform you about some of the issues you, or your friends, may encounter during your time as a student. More information can be found on any of these topics online, as well as at any of the specialist sources listed. If you are in need of more advice do not hesitate to contact your institution's student union, student support department or the Police for help on any of the issues covered.

This guide has been produced by NUS-USI (National Union of Students UK-Union of Students in Ireland) and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

→ Visit NUS-USI at www.nus-usi.org

→ Visit Police Service at www.psnipolice.uk





Budgeting

Money worries are a reality for many students. 58% of students in NI regularly worry about not having enough money to meet their basic living expenses, such as rent or utility bills, and 45% of students report that they struggle to concentrate on their studies without worrying about finances. It is important to always try to keep on top of your finances, and keep aware of your monthly outgoings and bills so you have no nasty surprises.

Many students find they need to work part-time to support their studies. Almost half of all students in NI work during term time, and around a third of these are working over 17 hours per week alongside their courses. For those working in part-time employment, longer hours are associated with poorer wellbeing, therefore it is very important to try to strike a balance between working and studying.

If you have children, be sure to take advantage of any childcare provisions your university or college may offer.

You may wish to join a trade union if you are working. Many students find themselves in low paid jobs and occasionally even in illegal employment situations. They also may face unfair dismissal. By joining a trade union you can help ensure your employment rights are respected, and will also have an opportunity to join with others to campaign on issues affecting workers.

→ Visit www.ictuni.org (the Northern Ireland Committee - Irish congress of Trade Unions) for more information

If you require help with an employment dispute contact the Labour Relations Agency on 028 9032 1442 for advice and referral.

***Statistics from NUS-USI Pound in your pocket survey can be found at: www.nus.org.uk → Search 'pound in your pocket'**

Tips for budgeting

Spread your money

If you receive a loan, spread it across a period of time rather than spending it all at once. One way you can do this is by putting your loan into a savings account and setting up a regular transfer to your current account every week or month.

Prioritise

Always make sure bills are paid first. You can change the date you pay your bills so that they leave your account soon after payday. Allow at least three working days in case payday or your bills fall on a weekend. Keep an eye on your bills and make sure you are not overpaying – for instance, your phone network will often continue to charge you even after your contract ends, with cancellation usually requiring at least 30 days notice. Make the most of your institution's resources, such as books and computers.

Be disciplined

Cut out luxury spending by not giving in to impulse buys.

Stick to it

At first it might seem hard, but budgeting will soon become second nature.

Be realistic

Allow for coffee breaks and nights out. Don't forget to factor in unforeseen costs like birthdays, Christmas and unexpected travel home. If you have a car, be mindful of the cost of petrol and repairs. If using public transport, save money by getting a travel card.

Increase your earnings

Check that your tax code is correct and that you are claiming any tax credits and benefits you are entitled to. Information about entitlement can be obtained from your local Citizens Advice Bureau or Jobs and Benefits Office. Information about how to claim can be found online at nidirect.

You might consider doing some overtime at work, especially during holiday periods

Providing all assignments are done, consider doing overtime at work, especially in the Christmas and summer holidays.

**If you are struggling financially your college/university may be able to help with student support or hardship funds. Talk to the relevant people to see what can be done. Contact your students' union or student services/support department.*

Safety tips

- Be wary of everyday transactions and know your rights as a consumer. Visit consumercouncil.org.uk for more information.
- Regularly keep track of your bank account. With well over a third of students having an overdraft, keeping an eye on your spending can help you to avoid costly charges incurred from exceeding your spending limit.
- Rising numbers of students are now relying on payday loans. Payday lending should be treated with extreme caution as it can be very easy to get into considerable debt.
- Never borrow money from unlicensed lenders, known as loan sharks. These lenders can be connected to paramilitary organisations and may charge extortionate interest rates and fees, as well as engage in intimidating behaviour. Report any loan sharks to the Trading Standards Office and, if you are being threatened by a loan shark, or if they use violence, report them to the police. Failing to repay a loan from an unlicensed lender isn't a criminal offence.
- If you are struggling financially there are always other options. Talk to your college or university about student support grants and hardship funds. There are other organisations that provide free money advice, such as the Money Advice Service or your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

- Gambling problems are a growing concern and students often lose more money than they gain. It is important to remember that in many universities/colleges evidence of gambling can disqualify a student from receiving any support grants.

→ For more information visit Gambleaware.co.uk

Organisations

Citizens Advice

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

0800 028 1881

Step-change

www.stepchange.org

0800 138 1111

The background features a dark blue sky with a network of white and green lines connecting various points. In the lower half, the silhouettes of several large, cylindrical silos are visible against a bright orange and yellow sunset. A dark grey rectangular box is positioned in the upper left, containing the word 'Housing' in white text.

Housing

If you're not living with family, you will be confronted with the tasks of renting accommodation, and keeping the property secure.

It is very important that you do your research when looking for a flat/house, as there are many factors to be taken into consideration:

- When am I moving?
- What area is the property in?
- What is your budget and are you entitled to any benefits?
- What are your accommodation needs?
- What condition is the accommodation in?
- How secure is the flat?
- How many people will you be living with, and do you need a property with a HMO, House in Multiple Occupancy license?
- Who will you be living with?
- What are the terms of your contract, and how long does it last for?

Moving

Leave plenty of time to get accommodation sorted out.

Area

Choose an area relatively close to where you study, especially if there is not a regular bus service and you don't drive. Research the area and try to get feedback from previous residents, before coming to a decision as to whether or not it would be right for you.

Budget

If you are paying your own rent, make an estimation of your finances for the year ahead. Take into account any loans/bursaries/benefits or income from any employment, and any regular bills and expenditures, in order to make an informed decision about what you can afford. Make sure you are claiming all that you are entitled to, and if you are struggling financially there may be help available. See 'Budgeting' section for more.

Needs

Think about what your needs will be. For example:

- How much space do you need?
- Will you be living by yourself, with friends, family or a partner?

- Do you have any children?
- What are transport links like?
- Is the property easily accessible?

Living conditions

Check that the accommodation is clean. Keep an eye out for things like damp and broken fixtures and fittings. Ask questions, for example, 'how easy is it to heat?' and 'what are the neighbours like?'

Security

Ask questions about the level of security of the flat, and in the general area. If there is a door entry system, make sure that it is in working order. Make sure the house has adequate locks, smoke detectors and a carbon monoxide detector. If not, request that these are installed in time for the move in date.

HMOs

For house shares with more than three people, who are not family members, the landlord will need a licence for a 'House in Multiple Occupation.' This is to ensure that certain health and safety requirements are met by the landlord, such as adequate cooking space, fire escapes and washing facilities.

Tenancy deposit scheme

Your landlord has a legal duty to protect your deposit. This is the sum of money you pay at the start of your contract, usually a month's rent, which the landlord keeps as a security in case of damage to the property or failure to pay rent. The landlord must put this money in a Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme within 14 days of receiving it.

Inventory

Be sure to complete an inventory as soon as you move in. This should document any existing damage to the property and help to avoid disputes further down the line. Be thorough and take photos to substantiate any damage. Don't be afraid to ask for repairs to be carried out.

Disputes

If any disputes arise, either with fellow tenants or your landlord, seek external advice. Your institution or students' union, as well as organisations such as Citizens Advice and the Housing Rights Service, can help to inform you of your rights in the event of a dispute.

Housing Rights

10 -12 High St, Belfast, County Antrim, BT1 2BA

028 9024 5640

housingadviseni.org

Homelessness

Homelessness can range from sleeping on the streets to couch surfing without a permanent home. If you find that you are homeless at any point during your studies, do not hesitate to contact your college or university as they may be able to help you find accommodation. Also get in touch with the Housing Executive as soon as possible. There are other organisations that can help, such as The Simon Community, The Welcome Organisation and Citizens Advice.

→ See www.homelessni.org for more information on services

Contact details

Simon Community

3-5 Malone Rd, Belfast,
County Antrim, BT9 6RT

0800 171 2222

www.simoncommunity.org

Welcome Organisation

Unit 36, 28 Townsend Street
Belfast, BT13 2ES

028 90 240424 / 07894 931 047

www.homelessbelfast.org



Securing your possessions

Financial struggles are an everyday reality for many students, therefore it makes sense to protect your most important possessions. Students can sometimes be seen as easy targets, especially when leaving accommodation vacant during holiday periods. Laptops, bicycles, games consoles (and even food!) are just some of the things that students find can be stolen. Whilst there is no guarantee your things will be 100% secure, there are steps to consider that will help keep your belongings safe from thieves:

At home

- Never underestimate the importance of keeping your house or flat secure.
- Discuss security with your housemates and make sure that all members of the household close all windows and lock any points of access when leaving. If possible, consider locking your bedroom door.
- Use light switch timers to give the appearance that the dwelling is occupied, especially when away for long periods of time.
- Mark any items of value. Property can be engraved with details or marked with UV pens/paint.
- Keep all valuable items out of sight when not in use.
- If you see signs of a break-in, like a smashed window or an open door, don't go in or touch anything. This is for your own safety and to preserve vital evidence. Call 999 for help.

Bicycles

- Use a strong lock; either a sturdy D-lock or heavy chain lock. Small chains and cord locks can be easily cut.
- Ideally lock the frame and both wheels and remove any accessories (eg lights and even seats).
- Mark your bike frame with your postcode or uni/college name and student ID number.
- Avail of PSNI Bike Safe Scheme. Contact 101 for details.
- If you can't find a secure bike store, lock up your bike where it can be seen – in a busy street, or near somewhere with good lighting and CCTV.
- It is important to make it as difficult as possible for anyone to steal your bike. If it does get stolen, report the crime.
- To help police recover your bicycle in the event of a theft you can register your bike on the national database at bikeregister.com
- Be mindful of your safety when cycling.

Laptops

- There are often vast amounts of personal data on a laptop. It is in your best interest to keep it as secure as possible, especially when mobile.
- Try not to leave your laptop on display, and don't leave it on show in a car.
- Keep a close eye on any bags containing your laptop when out.
- Back up all your work regularly, either online or on an external drive – nobody wants their coursework stolen.
- Make note of any relevant serial numbers.
- Mark your laptop.
- There is software available online to help track your laptop if it is lost or stolen. Laptops can often be tracked, traced and retrieved from criminals by police.

Mobile phones

- Unfortunately stolen phones are a very common occurrence. There are steps you can take to decrease the chances of this happening, but also steps to help prevent thieves using your phone, and to get your phone back if it has been taken.

Prevention

- Record your IMEI number. This is a unique ID code located on a strip normally found behind the battery of the handset or by calling *#06#.
- Be aware of your surroundings when using your phone in public.
- Try not to leave it unattended.
- Install a tracker application.
- Lock your phone with a PIN code or equivalent.
- Taking out insurance can allow you to claim for a new handset in the event of theft. This can also extend to phones that have been damaged or broken. Always read any insurance terms and conditions very carefully to make sure you are covered.
- You can register your phone for free on immobilise.com. This allows police to quickly identify you as the owner in the event that your phone is stolen and recovered.

Theft

- As soon as you realise your phone is stolen, report it to your network operator. Doing so allows the network to cancel your SIM, avoiding potentially large bills for unauthorised calls which you may otherwise be liable for. It is as easy to deactivate a SIM as it is to cancel a credit card.

- Check the terms of any insurance you may have. You may be covered under your home or car insurance. In some cases, a parent's home insurance may cover the loss. If you do not have insurance you may have to purchase a new phone until your contract expires.
- Check to see if you can discover your phone's location through any tracking software installed.
- Report the theft to the police.

Cars, motorbikes and scooters

- Perhaps surprisingly, most cars are stolen because they are unlocked. Always make sure to lock your vehicle.
- Never leave the keys in the ignition: a prime example is when paying for petrol, or opening a gate.
- Hide car documents and keys at home.
- Get a car alarm, steering lock or immobiliser fitted.
- Think about where you are parking. Endeavour to use a well-lit secure car park, and think about your personal safety for when you are returning to your vehicle.
- Motorbikes and scooters should always be securely locked to something immovable. Failure to do so can potentially disallow an insurance claim.



Health

Looking after your physical, mental and sexual health whilst studying should not be ignored.

All students should make sure that they are registered with a GP. International students will have paid the immigration health surcharge through their visa application and are therefore also entitled to healthcare provision. Remember that all prescriptions dispensed in Northern Ireland are free of charge.

Physical health

If you feel unwell for any reason, especially if it lasts for more than a couple of days, book an appointment with your GP.

Be aware of your health whilst studying. Even on a budget it is possible to eat well and have a healthy lifestyle without having to resort to costly health crazes. A balanced diet coupled with keeping active is important; for example, getting into the habit of eating a nutritious breakfast before class can do wonders, keeping you feeling good inside and out.

→ **More information can be found on the 'Student Health' and 'Healthy Eating' sections of the NHS website.**

Disabled students

Students can experience disability in various forms, such as through physical and mobility difficulties, visual impairments, dyslexia, mental ill health and autism. With adjustments, a student who identifies as disabled can participate in the same way as anybody else, and therefore it is important to make sure you feel comfortable that your institution or workplace has made reasonable adjustments.

If you require any information or assistance relating to your time at college/university, such as additional study needs, or help on receiving Disabled Students' Allowance, contact your institution's student support, guidance centre or your students' union.

For more help relating to disability rights, the following organisations can provide information and assistance.

NI Human Rights Commission	nihrc.org
Equality Commission	equalityni.org
Disability Action	disabilityaction.org
Disability Rights UK	disabilityrightsuk.org
Mencap NI	mencap.org.uk
Eating Disorders Association NI	eatingdisordersni.co.uk

NUS-USI also has an autonomous Disabled Students' Campaign working nationally, locally and at college level to make sure the needs of disabled students are represented. To find out more about this campaign, or to get involved, please visit www.nus-usi.org.

Sexual health

It is important to keep an eye on your sexual health whilst studying, and there are resources available to help you do so. If you are worried that you have caught a sexually transmitted infection you can get tested at your nearest clinic. There are six Genito-urinary Medicine (GUM) Clinics across Northern Ireland – the locations for which can be found on the HSC website. The GUM clinic in Belfast is by appointment only and based at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

As far as contraception and family planning are concerned, each HSC Trust runs local clinics that are open at various times throughout the week.

Information and materials are available from the following organisations:

HSC Sexual Health Centres

Daily clinics in various locations in NI

Brook

Free and confidential sexual health services, support and advice for women under 19 and men under 25

Family Planning Association

Information on sexual health, sex and relationships

Marie Stopes

This is a private clinic, which charges a fee, and provides counselling and abortion services within the law of Northern Ireland.

Local family planning clinics and services at your university or college

Mental health

Research shows that mental health issues are common amongst the student population.

Evidence suggests that one in four students will experience a mental health problem whilst at college or university.

This may be related to challenges such as:

- Leaving home
- Separating from parents/family members
- Finding identity as an adult and your place in the world
- Managing a budget
- Loneliness
- Coping with study

These issues can cause anxiety and stress. Telling someone how you feel can make a huge difference, so talk to someone you trust such as a friend, relative or your GP. Be sure to check out counselling services within your institution. Both short and long-term issues can be improved through counselling, lifestyle changes and other treatments.

- For everyday betterment of mental health, it is important that students get enough sleep. The amount of sleep that you need depends on the individual, but 7-9 hours serves as a good guideline for most adults.
- Students can often suffer from conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder or eating disorders. There is always help and support available:

If you are in distress or despair call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000

Remember you are not alone. For advice and detailed information on services that can offer help visit mindingyourhead.info

Exam stress

Exam period can be a very stressful time for students. Check out our tips for dealing with exam stress:

Make a revision plan

If you are well prepared you will feel much calmer when exam time comes around. Equally, don't worry if you don't stick to your plan religiously. If you miss a session, just pick up from where you left off and don't beat yourself up about it. Do as much as you can and remind yourself how much you've done. Making a note of all your hard work will make you feel better.

Take lots of breaks

Add time in your plan for breaks and plenty of sleep. Exercise can also help, as can eating nourishing food. This will help your energy levels and concentration. Brain food, such as fish and vegetables can make a big difference to your concentration levels. Limit the amount of caffeine you have, as this can affect your sleep, and replace it with water.

Keep calm in the exam hall

Take a few minutes to compose yourself.

Read the questions a few times and allocate time to each, adding in time for structuring your answers if they are essay based. Making short notes and annotations on questions at the beginning may help jog your memory and reassure you. If you do not think that you can do a question put it out of your mind and tackle it last.

After leaving an exam room, don't think any more about it

Analysing answers with your friends and worrying about how you did will increase stress and may affect your performance in other exams.

Keep things in perspective

Stressing and worrying uses up energy meaning that you will not be able to work as effectively. Preparing well beforehand is all your institution asks of you during exam time.

If exam stress is getting too much for you and you do not feel like you can cope, talk to somebody about it. Your union or student support department will often be able to point you in the direction of advisers who are there solely to help students. You may also speak to your GP.

If things in your personal life are affecting your exam performance, make your department aware of this as it may be able to take these into account when marking your exams. Each department has procedures for submitting mitigating circumstances.

Don't worry in silence. NUS research showed that 93% of students asked have experienced mental distress at one time or another. There are services available to help students so make sure you make the most of them.

Bullying

If you feel like you are being bullied, do not be afraid to seek help. This behaviour is not acceptable in any college or university. Make a note of the events, the people involved, as well as how it makes you feel, and talk to someone in your college or university.

Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol

If you choose to drink, know your limits and be sensible about how much you consume. It's quite easy to go overboard if you're not paying attention. Alcohol can be perfectly safe within moderation, however, excessive drinking can lead to physical and mental health problems. Dangers can result not just from the harmful physical effects of over-consumption of alcohol, but also the fact that you are much more likely to come to another kind of harm, when under the influence.

It is advised that people should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units of alcohol for men and 2-3 units of alcohol for women.

For example, a standard glass of wine is usually around 2.1 units, and a pint of beer or cider can be between 2 and 3 units depending on its strength.

→ To find out more see: www.drinkaware.co.uk

When drinking, stay with your friends and remember that there is safety in numbers. See section on Going out.

Tobacco

Aside from taking its toll on your finances, smoking as a student can take a serious toll on your health. Smoking increases your risk of developing multiple serious health conditions, including many different forms of cancer, coronary heart disease, stroke, heart attacks, bronchitis and emphysema. It can also make it more difficult for your body to fight illnesses such as the common cold, and can exacerbate asthma. Smoking is extremely addictive and can be difficult to quit. The sooner you decide not to smoke, the better for your health.

→ For advice on quitting smoking:
book an appointment with your GP or visit www.want2stop.info

Note: E- cigarettes: Whilst electronic cigarettes are commonly seen to be less harmful than cigarettes containing tobacco, not enough research has been done to prove just how safe they actually are. E-cigarettes still contain nicotine, the highly addictive stimulant found in tobacco, as well as unknown substances which make up the various flavourings users are inhaling.

Drugs

During your time as a student you may find yourself around drugs. It is important to be informed and know the risks that surround drug use, as well as the law and potential penalties, for the safety of yourself and your friends.

Most non-prescription drugs are illegal because they pose significant risks to a person or society. The abuse of prescription medication can be just as dangerous. When under the influence of drugs, people are more likely to become victims of crime and find it much harder to make informed decisions.

The penalties for drug possession can range from up to two years in prison (Class C drugs) to seven years in prison and an unlimited fine (Class A drugs).

A short guide to commonly found drugs

New Psychoactive Substances (Black Mamba, Spice, MKAT)

Often known as 'Legal Highs', these substances are no longer legal. These drugs are unpredictable as their chemical components and long-term effects may be completely unknown

Cannabis (Weed, Marijuana, Hash)

Cannabis is one of the world's most widely used recreational drugs and is a Class B drug in the UK. The two main active ingredients in cannabis are THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) and CBD (cannabidiol). Despite being seen as harmless by some, regular recreational use of cannabis (especially cannabis that is high in THC, known as 'Skunk') can contribute to the development of schizophrenia and psychosis. In the short-term, cannabis can create feelings of relaxation and happiness, but paranoia, panic attacks, nausea and memory loss can be common negative effects.

Ecstasy (Es, MDMA)

Ecstasy is a Class A drug in the UK and is commonly associated with dance culture. When taken, Ecstasy can allow the user to experience feelings of increased energy, euphoria and hallucinations. Ecstasy tablets are rarely pure and can be cut with other drugs or substances to make them cheaper to produce and sell, which means they can be dangerous, harmful and unpredictable. This too applies to anything

referred to as 'MDMA' which is the chemical name for the substance. Purity aside, ecstasy can trigger dangerous reactions in individuals with underlying health conditions, and can be exacerbated by warm environments. Ecstasy can make you dehydrated. It's not the ecstasy itself, but the loss of water caused by sweating, often brought on by dancing. If you have taken ecstasy it is important to keep sipping fluids (water or an isotonic sports drink) – about a pint an hour, little and often, no more.

Ketamine, GHB and GBL

These drugs have anaesthetic effects which can be fatal on their own and even more so when taken with alcohol. When taking these drugs you will feel less pain, so if you hurt yourself you may not feel it until the effect wears off hours later. Ketamine is a Class B drug, and can cause hallucinations and a sense of detachment from oneself. Long term use has been linked to major bladder problems. GHB and GBL are Class C drugs and can have unpredictable side-effects. GHB is otherwise known as the date-rape drug and can be used to spike drinks (see 'Going out' section).

Cocaine (Coke, Charlie)

Cocaine is a powerful Class A drug that stimulates the brain, giving the user an energetic feeling. It is very addictive, can cause heart damage, and overdoses can be fatal.

Heroin (Blow, Smack)

Heroin is a very strong opiate that relaxes the body. Overdosing can lead to dangerously low blood pressure, heart failure, and death, due to the body essentially forgetting to breathe. Heroin is extremely addictive and can take over the user's life with intense physical and psychological addiction. Heroin addiction is a very troubling condition and can lead to spiralling personal and social problems. There is no such thing as a typical heroin addict, and heroin addiction affects people in all sections of the population. Heroin is a class A drug and is commonly injected, with needle sharing being linked to the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B and C.

→ More information about drugs can be found at www.talktofrank.com

What are the risks?

- All drugs can affect people in different ways. The effects some people experience will not necessarily be the ones you encounter. Your body chemistry, as well as your mindset can play a large part in how a psychoactive drug affects you.
- There is no guarantee that the substance you may take is what you think it is, meaning that you never know what you are getting. Be aware of the effects of any drug you may take.

- No drug is 100% safe, and anything you put into your body can have lasting effects.
- Alcohol is a depressant and doesn't mix well with drugs.
- Your immune system gets hit hard and drugs can take a toll on your organs. Your body is working overtime meaning that you'll be more susceptible to everyday colds and viruses.
- It's worth knowing the law about the drugs as you can face years in prison for taking or possessing some drugs.
- It is important to note that if you are found guilty of a drug offence this will have significant implications for your future life. You may not be able to take up the career that you hoped and some countries will not let you in, even as a tourist, if you have been found guilty of a drug offence.

If you decide to take drugs, always make sure you are with people you trust, and that they know what you have taken. Watch out for your friends, and never be afraid to ask others for help.



Going out

Student life isn't all about studying, so socialising and nights out can be a big part of your student experience. When out for the night it is important to be cautious of your safety, and the safety of your friends, especially when there's alcohol involved. Keep aware of the following tips to help minimise any possible danger.

Before

- It helps to know where you are going, and where you might end up before you set out.
- Tell someone what your plans are.
- Try to make sure your phone is charged before setting off.
- Carry a personal alarm with you when out at night.
- If pre-drinking, know your limits and stay in control.

When you're out

- Spiking drinks with drugs or alcohol does happen, so be cautious when you are out. The risks can be reduced if certain precautions are taken, such as; watching your drink get poured; only accepting drinks from people you trust, or; checking for any signs your drink has been tampered with. If you suspect that you or one of your friends has had their drink spiked seek help immediately.
- Enjoy yourself whilst knowing your limits. Getting too drunk isn't fun and can potentially lead to danger.
- Keep an eye on your friends, especially if you feel that they may have had too much to drink.
- Know the whereabouts of your belongings at all times.

Getting home

- Before going out, make sure you know how you are getting home and where to meet your mates, if you get split up.
- Return home with friends. There is safety in numbers. Avoid returning home alone where possible.

- Never drink and drive, and never receive a lift from somebody you know has consumed alcohol. Drivers under the influence of any illegal substance (and certain prescription medications) dramatically increase their risk of crashing.
- Taxis are a great, safe way to get home after a night out, make sure you have one pre booked. However, you should always check that your taxi is genuine or only ever order it from a company you trust. If you are alone, ask the driver to wait until you are safely inside your home.
 - If you have any doubts then do not get in the taxi.
 - Taxi drivers must carry identification
 - check it before you get in.
 - Legal taxis must display a special number plate.
 - If you feel uneasy, ask to be let out in a well-lit area where there are plenty of people.
 - If you believe that a vehicle is unlicensed, or encounter any problems, report it immediately. If possible, make a note of:
 - The driver's badge number and vehicle license number.
 - The name of the taxi firm.
 - The details, date and time of the incident.



Online safety

Staying safe online is a growing concern for students. Whether you are using the internet for research, shopping, connecting with people or dating, you should be aware of the dangers present.

Be careful when putting anything online

- Pay attention to your privacy settings on social networks, and try to keep as much as you can private. You may not want the public (or future employers!) finding your freshers' week photos.
- Be cautious when giving your personal information to any websites. This information can often be viewed or shared by people who you don't know, or even sold off to other companies.
- A website will be secure if the first part of the web address is `https://`.
- Think before you post. What goes online, stays online. Avoid posting on social media when you are angry or upset.
- Always think before sending anyone photos of yourself. Remember that once you send an image, you no longer have control over it.

Take steps to avoid identity theft online

- Be aware of 'phishing' scams. These scams attempt to steal your personal information by mimicking the email correspondence or websites of legitimate organisations. Never give out card details via email, be wary of disclosing personal details and always be extremely careful when being asked to send any usernames or passwords.
- Pick strong passwords with a mix of alphabetical and numerical characters, with a mix of upper & lower case, and symbols if possible. This is to prevent individuals or malicious software from guessing your code. Use as many different passwords as possible for different accounts.
- Make sure you have updated antivirus and antispyware software. Download legitimate and recommended programs. Free solutions are available. Scan your computer regularly and beware of pop-ups purporting to be computer cleaning programs.

If using online dating services

- Tell a friend or family member when and where you are meeting somebody.
- Always meet for the first time in a public place.
- Watch out for scammers, and never send any money or share bank details with individuals.

Cyber safety

Online abuse can take many forms. Do not be afraid to seek help. Report the incident to someone you trust, or to the police. Know that there is always help available and there are always solutions. Keep evidence of any abuse that takes place and make use of any 'report abuse' or 'block sender' facilities. Do not hesitate to contact websites, telephone companies and internet service providers. Any threatening behaviour should be reported to the police immediately.

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Emergency Number: 999

Non-emergencies: 101

Consent

Many relationships occur during your time at university or college and no matter what form these relationships take they should always be healthy, positive and informed.

Consent is:

- Mutual.
- Active.
- Respecting boundaries.
- Retractable.
- Willingly given.

**How you dress never signals consent.
Remember, without consent it is rape.**

If you feel that you have had a negative sexual or relationship experience then please find contact details for organisations which are confidential and non-judgmental at the end of this section.

**from the 'I Heart Consent' NUS women's campaign*

Street harassment and sexual assault

Street harassment can be sexist, racist, transphobic and homophobic. It occurs in public spaces and can often make people feel intimidated or uncomfortable.

Street Harassment encompasses the follow actions:

- Comments about someone's appearance, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
- Vulgar gestures.
- Sexually explicit comments (e.g., "Hey baby, I'd like a piece of that")
 - Leering.
 - Whistling.
 - Barking.
 - Kissing noises.
 - Following someone.
 - Flashing someone or exposing oneself.

- Blocking someone's path.
- Sexual touching or grabbing.
(e.g., touching someone's legs, breasts or bum)
- Public masturbation.

Everybody has the right to access public spaces regardless of your gender, race, sexuality or age. If you feel that you have experienced harassment on the street there are organisations that have your back.

If you have experienced a sexual assault on campus there will be confidential services available to discuss your experience. You may also want to contact other organisations located at the back of this guide.

Domestic violence

The NUS 'Hidden Marks' survey revealed that 1 in 7 women students is a victim of sexual assault or violence. It is not ok, and not legal, for anyone to assert physical force on a partner or family member. Report any abuse to your institution and the police. The police have local domestic violence officers trained to help. If you are in an abusive relationship there is also help available through organisations such as Women's Aid, the National Domestic Violence Helpline and Men's Advisory Project.

Contact details

Brook Northern Ireland

Free and confidential sexual health and wellbeing service

0289 032 8866

The Rowan

This is the regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre for Northern Ireland, offering support and services for children, young people, women and men who have experienced sexual violence and abuse, recently and in the past.

0800 389 4424 (24 hours)

Marie Stopes International

Independent provider of sexual health and reproductive health services

0345 300 8090 (24 hrs)

Women's Aid

24 hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline

0289 066 6049 (9-5pm)

National Domestic Violence Helpline

This is the 24 hour Northern Ireland helpline

0800 802 1414

**To contact a Police Service Domestic Violence Officer dial 101
If you ever feel in immediate danger dial 999**

Hate Crime



A hate crime or incident will be recorded where it is perceived that the perpetrator's hostility or prejudice against any person or property is on the grounds of the victim's ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, political opinion or disability.

Hate crimes can take many forms, including:

- Verbal abuse/intimidation and harassment
- Physical assault which can include; punching, slapping, hair pulling, biting, burning hitting, choking or kicking
- Criminal damage to property

The impact of hate crime can be long lasting and far reaching, going beyond the victim's own experience and increasing fear in the wider community.

Tell someone

There are a number of ways to report a hate crime whether you are the victim or a witness:

- In an emergency always dial '999'
- Contact police on the non-emergency number 101 and choose option 2
- Police Service of Northern Ireland's website – www.psnl.police.uk
- True Vision website
- At a police station

There are also lots of groups out there who can help:

The Rainbow Project is a health organisation that works to improve the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender people in Northern Ireland.

Belfast Centre

The Rainbow Project
Belfast LGBT Centre
1st Floor
9-13 Waring Street
Belfast
BT1 2DX

Tel: (028) 9031 9030

Fax: (028) 9031 9031

Web: www.rainbow-project.org/contact

Email: info@rainbow-project.org

Foyle Centre

The Rainbow Project
Orlan House
20 Strand Road
Derry/Londonderry
BT48 7AB

Tel: (028) 7128 3030

Fax: (028) 7128 3060

Equality Commission

Equality House
7-9 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DP

Tel: 028 90 500 600

Fax: 028 90 248 687

Email: information@equalityni.org

Web: www.equalityni.org/Home

SAIL

SAIL is a support group for the families of gender variant or Transgender individuals of any age who are in need of help, support or advice, whatever the circumstances.

Tel: 07510228411

Email: sail@transgenderni.com

Web: www.lgbttni.org → search 'sail'

GLYNI

Cara-Friend is an organisation dedicated to supporting, empowering, educating, and offering friendship to everyone in the LGBT community. Cara-Friend offer services such as the LGBT switchboard NI, which allows individuals to talk to someone about their sexuality, and GLYNI (Gay and Lesbian Youth NI), which provides an open social space for young people to meet others who are LGBT or Q.

Cara-Friend LGBT Centre

9 Waring St, Belfast, BT1 2DX, UK

Tel: 028 90 89 0202

Tel: (LGBT switchboard NI): 0808 8000 390

Email: mark@cara-friend.org.uk

Web: www.cara-friend.org.uk

You can also speak to someone at your university, be it a lecturer or someone from the Student Union. Don't suffer in silence.

Don't forget:

University is an opportunity to meet new people. Make sure your language, attitude and behaviour is respectful of everyone you meet.

A woman with dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a white sweater and a black bag, is seen from behind looking out a train window. The background is blurred, showing the interior of the train. A network diagram with blue lines and dots is overlaid on the image.

International students

Studying abroad can be a fantastic experience. Whilst all the information in this guide applies to you, below are some helpful tips for international students:

- Use the internet to learn as much as you can about your university or college and the local area. Familiarise yourself with local laws, culture and practices.
- When studying in Northern Ireland, it is useful to take steps to learn about the political history of the region.
- Make photocopies of any important documents, scan or photograph and save somewhere secure.
- Make sure any property insurance you may have covers you whilst travelling abroad.
- Don't carry large amounts of cash with you at one particular time. Opening a bank or building society account gives you a safer place to store your money.
- Keep in contact with your institution or students' union for advice, and keep these contact details handy.

Health

- If coming from the EU, make sure you have brought your European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)
- If you are a non-EEA national, and studying in Northern Ireland for more than six months, you will have paid the immigration health surcharge. This entitles you to treatment on the same basis as UK nationals

→ See: www.ukcisa.org.uk → Search 'international students/ study work/ health and healthcare'

Visas and work

(Does not apply to those with home student status, including students from the EU and EEA)

- Make sure you complete registration at your institution before the deadline
- It is crucial that you keep good attendance, and report any absences. Under Home Office policy, failure to attend classes must be reported by your sponsor institution, and can lead to your visa being terminated.
- Register with police (if applicable)
- Check the terms of your visa before starting any employment, as not all students are allowed to work. Any permission to work is subject to restrictions, so you should check your visa for details.
- The number of hours you can work, if any, can be found on your visa
- If you are starting work you must apply for a National Insurance number
- Keep track of when your visa expires and, if applicable, don't leave it until the last minute to renew it!

Out and about

- After dark, try not to travel alone, and keep to well-lit, busy streets. As dark nights set in during winter you could be more at risk, so get used to the safest way around.
- If you are unfamiliar with an area, look up a map before you leave your accommodation. Try to be discrete if using a smartphone to reduce the risk of theft.
- Avoid taking strangers back to where you live and report anything suspicious.
- If you are not used to drinking alcohol, drink sensibly and stay safe and aware. Remember that in social situations, it can be much more difficult to reason with somebody who is drunk. Be wary, and walk away from any confrontation.
- If you are attacked, shout, call for help and run away if you can. Never take matters into your own hands

→ See section on **Going out** for more advice

In an emergency call 999 for the police, fire or ambulance service.
The non-emergency number for the police is 101.



Your union

Aside from being a vital social hub, your union exists to represent you and your fellow students. The sort of issues SUs address can range from individual student welfare, through to matters of international importance. Even if you aren't intending to run for an elected post, your student union can be whatever you make it. If you have a burning issue that you want raised, there are multiple ways of making your voice heard. For instance, depending on the structure of your union, you could:

- run as a student officer, councillor, class representative or campus representative
- submit a motion to your student council
- contact a student or staff officer in your SU or the student engagement department of your institution
- request to attend any relevant meetings
- follow and engage with the activity of your union online, for instance, through social media or the SU website
- arrange, coordinate or partake in student activism

Get involved with one of the clubs and societies which may exist in your university or college, it's a great way of making friends.

NUS-USI

Our role in representation

NUS-USI is the umbrella body for all students' unions in Northern Ireland, and exists to bring together, represent, and provide a collective voice for students across the country.

We represent the interests of over 200,000 students in Northern Ireland and campaign on students' behalf in many different fields such as student hardship, health, prejudice and accommodation.

We also provide an infrastructure that helps individual students' unions in the North of Ireland to develop their own work through our research, training and development functions.



History and structure

The National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI) was established in 1972 under a unique arrangement where both the British and Irish national student unions, National Union of Students (NUS) and Union of Students in Ireland (USI) respectively, jointly organised in Northern Ireland to promote student unity across the sectarian divide. The trilateral committee meets three times annually; once in London, once in Dublin and once in Belfast.

Throughout the year decisions are made by the NUS-USI regional executive committee in collaboration with our membership.

Visit our website to find out about our campaigns, and to keep updated with the latest news and events. NUS-USI and your students' union is there to represent you, so get involved and make your voice heard.

→ www.nus-usi.org

NUS-USI members

Belfast Metropolitan College Students' Union

College of Agriculture, Food & Rural Enterprise Students' Union

Northern Regional College Students' Union

North West Regional College Students' Union

Queen's University Belfast Students' Union

South Eastern Regional College Students' Union

South West College Students' Union

Southern Regional College Students' Union

St Mary's University College Students' Union

Stranmillis University College Students' Union

Ulster University Students' Union

Endnotes

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Emergency Number: 999

Non-emergencies: 101

Crimestoppers

A charity dedicated to fighting crime across Northern Ireland, allowing you to provide information about crime anonymously

0800 555 111

Victim Support NI

Provides free and confidential information and support to people who are victims of crime or attending a court in the region

www.victimsupportni.co.uk

Belfast Office
70/74 Ann Street Belfast, BT1 4EH

028 9024 3133

Crime Prevention Information

www.psnl.police.uk/adviceinformation/adviceforstudents



**CALL THE
POLICE**

101

IN AN EMERGENCY ALWAYS CALL 999