



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS HANDBOOK*

*A GUIDE TO LIFE AT ESSEX

Say hello to your Students' Union



This is your place – shaped, used & run by you.

Your SU membership comes with some serious perks.

No forms. No fees. No drama.

Just support, community, opportunities – and a team whose job is to make your university experience better.

We're here to help you:

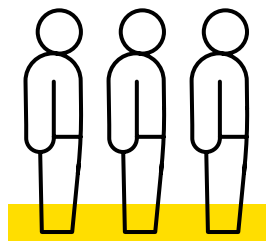
- Get a great degree & dream job
- Grow your own way. No pressure.
- Find your people. Feel at home.
- Get support when you need it.
- Use your voice. Make change happen.

You'll also find lots of spaces that belong to you. Look for the house icon on campus – that's how you know it's an SU venue. From the SU Bar to SU Advice, The Greenhouse Cafés to study spaces – if there's a house on the door, it's yours.

Whether you're here to caffeinate, celebrate, or concentrate, there's an SU space waiting for you.

This guide was put together by your SU Student Leaders. They've been in your shoes – moving to a new country, starting a new chapter – and they know what it's like.

British Culture

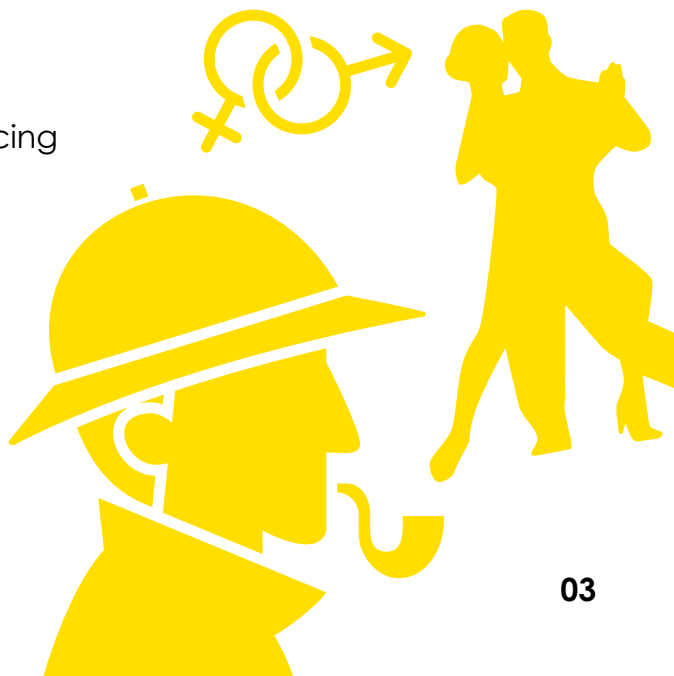


Queueing is an important part of British life, and people take it seriously — everyone is expected to wait their turn at shops, bus stops, or for food, and skipping the queue is seen as rude.

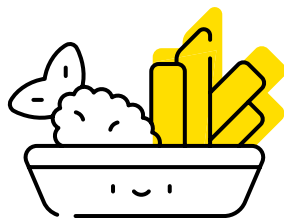
Sport is also central to British culture, with football being the most popular, followed by rugby, cricket, tennis (especially during Wimbledon), and Formula 1, often sparking lively debates and uniting or dividing the nation during big matches.

British television is a great way to understand the culture, humour, and daily life. Here are some popular shows that reflect different aspects of the UK:

- Outnumbered
- Inbetweeners
- Strictly Come Dancing
- Sherlock
- Sex Education
- Bridgerton
- Fleabag



Food



Food in the UK is more diverse than ever, but some traditional dishes are still widely enjoyed:

Afternoon Tea – A light meal usually served in the late afternoon, including tea, finger sandwiches, scones with jam and cream, and small cakes.

Sunday Roast – A traditional Sunday meal featuring roast meat (usually beef, chicken, lamb or pork), potatoes, vegetables, and Yorkshire pudding, all covered in gravy.

Fish and Chips – Fried battered fish with chips (fries), usually eaten with mushy peas and vinegar. Often served in takeaways or near the seaside.

Full English Breakfast – A hearty breakfast that may include eggs, bacon, sausages, beans, tomatoes, mushrooms, toast, and sometimes black pudding. Not usually eaten every day, but popular on weekends or in cafes.

SU Market – Every Thursday, Square 3 comes alive with our buzzing SU Market! Think fresh fruit and veg, world foods, tasty snacks, handmade gifts, clothing and more – all brought to campus by independent traders. It's your one-stop shop for stocking up on essentials, treating yourself, or grabbing something a bit different for lunch.

Weather



The British are known for talking about the weather because it changes often and can be unpredictable. You might get sunshine, rain, and wind in the same day, even in summer. Winters are usually cold and wet, while summers are mild with average highs around 20–25°C.

Snow is uncommon but does happen sometimes. People often dress in layers and carry an umbrella or waterproof jacket. Talking about the weather is also a popular way to start a conversation.

Education



Depending on your course, you'll likely be assessed through a combination of coursework and exams. Coursework can include essays, dissertations, portfolios, group projects or presentations. Exams may be open-book, where you're allowed to consult notes or textbooks, or closed-book, where no materials are permitted. It's important to understand the format for each module and prepare accordingly. The grading scale for assessments is below:

Undergraduate	%
First	70+
2:1	60+
2:2	50+
Third	40+
Fail	<40

Postgraduate	%
Distinction	70+
Merit	60+
Pass	50+
Fail	<50

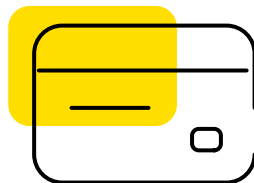
In many departments, especially at undergraduate level, marks above 80% for coursework.

Most modules start with a lecture introducing key ideas, followed by a seminar or, in some subjects, a lab or practical session. Seminars allow you to discuss topics in more depth, and completing assigned reading beforehand is important to take part effectively, develop critical thinking, and deepen your understanding.

Referencing is an important part of academic writing in the UK, and the university uses eight different styles, with each department having its own. Make sure to learn your department's style early, as proper referencing helps you avoid plagiarism, which is a serious academic offence. The university offers **Skills@Essex**, a platform with guidance on referencing, academic writing, note-taking, revision, and presentations. Scan the QR code below to access it and build your academic skills.

University study involves a lot of independent learning. Alongside your weekly contact hours in lectures, seminars, or other sessions, you are expected to manage your time, complete readings, work on assignments, review lecture material, and prepare for exams. All students can also access academic English classes which can be booked through CareerHub.

VISAs



It's important to tap your student card each time you enter class. You can do this from 15 minutes before the lecture starts until 15 minutes after. Tapping your card outside of these times will mark you as absent. Visa holders are expected to attend all teaching events in person, unless you have an authorised approved absence request. If you have any enquiries about your Visa or Immigration status, please use the form on this page to submit your question: www1.essex.ac.uk/immigration/enquiry/ Check your university email every day- Important updates are sent there, including changes to teaching events and updates from your department.

If you are struggling to pay your fees, speak to the university about a payment plan for tuition fees, that can make things easier.

Create an account on Gradintelligence to access your official certificates like the Certificate of Registration and academic transcripts.

Make sure you understand any Student Visa conditions about working during your studies – breaching these conditions can have serious implications for you.

For one-to-one help, especially with financial matters, visit the Student Services Hub in the Silberrad building.

For further information and to make immigration-related enquiries, you can go to: www1.essex.ac.uk/immigration/enquiry/

Finances



The main banks in the UK are HSBC, Lloyds, Santander. Digital Banks: Monzo and Revolut.

To open a bank account, you will usually need proof of identity such as your passport, or if you're from the European Economic Area, your passport or national ID card. If you're a non-European student, you'll also need your valid visa.

Always carry your student ID for discounts or use the Student Beans or UniDays apps for deals at over a hundred brands. On campus, bring your own cup to Starbucks or the Greenhouse for 50p off, pay £2 at the Kitchen's Kindness Offer for a free drink for someone else, and grab a meal deal at the SU Store. It's useful to have both a traditional and digital account like Revolut, which offers no foreign transaction fees, good exchange rates, and easy balance checks abroad.

Living Independently



Laundry at Essex uses the Circuit service, but there are three different Circuit apps, so adding money to the wrong one can be frustrating. Each accommodation block has its own launderette, with Hex being the cheapest if you don't mind the walk.

For shopping, Tesco is a 15-minute walk from campus and has all the food you need, plus a few extras. Get a Clubcard to enjoy small discounts at the till. Home Bargains next to Quays... is great for cheap furniture, bedding, kitchenware, and those £1.99 impulse buys that 'might come in handy.'

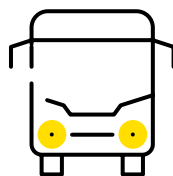
Health comes first, or at least it should. Register with a GP as soon as you arrive. The author of this section neglected to do so for two years and would strongly advise against following that example. Trying to join a doctor's surgery when you're already ill is, as it turns out, inconvenient.

You can do this online at:

www.essex.ac.uk/student/healthcare/registration

or by calling **01206 794484**

Transport



From Stansted Airport, the **X20** bus takes you directly to Colchester for around **£3.00**.

In town, the main buses are: The **51**, which goes to campus, Quays, Osborne Street and North Station. It's a bit slower but covers more stops. A single ticket starts at about **£2.50**.

The **87**, which also goes to campus, Tesco, the High Street, North Station and Greenstead. This one is usually quicker than the 51. Tickets also start at **£2.50**.

The **71**, which links campus with Hythe, Tesco, Osborne Street and the areas around Hythe Station. Again, a single ticket is about **£2.50**.

Wellbeing



Support The Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service (SWIS) is here to support you with your wellbeing.

University life can feel overwhelming at times, so SWIS offers free and confidential help with mental health, disability support, academic worries, money concerns, and accommodation issues. You can reach them by phone at **01206 873133** or by email at **wellbeing@essex.ac.uk**

Patrol Officers are based in the Security and Safety Centre on Square 3. They are available 24/7, every day of the year. They are trained first aiders and always ready to help. Call **01206 872125** from any phone, or **2125** from your StudentCom phone in accommodation.

Students' Union Advice team can guide you with visa extensions, academic appeals, extenuating circumstances, housing advice, university complaints, PhD concerns, and more. They can also accompany you to university meetings. If you ever find yourself in a financial emergency, they offer a small loan of up to £100. The SU is also a Hate Incident Reporting Centre. **suadvice@essex.ac.uk**

Wellbeing Support Line: Available 24 hours a day, including weekends and bank holidays. The contact number is 0800 028 3766.

Bars & Nightlife



Campus nightlife ranges from loud chaos to mild sophistication, depending on how much you enjoy shouting over music or pretending to be cultured.

SU BAR: your go-to spot for music, games, and a lively atmosphere that occasionally descends into organised chaos. With pool tables, comfy couches, and outdoor seating for the occasional breather, it strikes a balance between fun and mayhem. Cam, the manager, keeps things buzzing with bingo nights, karaoke, and other events that make every visit memorable.

Milk it: Monday nights at SU BAR with a DJ, a cow mascot, and a crowd that refuses to believe the weekend is over. Closes at 2 a.m., giving you just enough time to contemplate the meaning of “weekend” while it’s already Tuesday.

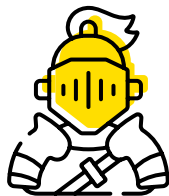
Socials: Commuting, Middle Eastern, South Asian, European, International, North American, Black, PGR, Women, Disabilities, PGT, LGBTQ+, Central Asian, Latin American, pick your community and meet your people. It’s essentially an excuse to eat pizza and figure out who you’ll spend the rest of term awkwardly waving at in lectures.

TOP BAR: quieter and more refined, with a pool table and darts for the occasional show of skill. Ideal for those who want to feel classy without doing anything particularly classy. Expect nicer martini glasses, well-presented drinks, and warm-toned ambient lighting that somehow makes you feel sophisticated while sitting in a comfy corner.

Sub Zero – Our underground nightclub in Underground Square 3 hosts FED Night on Wednesdays, making you question life choices and footwear, and ROGUE Nights on Saturdays, fully student-led with themed music and chaos. Society execs get free tickets, a benefit worth mentioning on LinkedIn.

Friday Society Takeovers, each week, a different society assumes control of the SU Bar or Sub Zero. Latin American Society, MENA, and others bring music, dancing, and a structured excuse to avoid doing anything else important.

Colchester



Colchester, Britain's oldest recorded town, which the locals won't let you forget, is a place where history meets... an alarming number of Essex Uni students. The town centre and High Street are full of shops and restaurants, Japanese, Indian, Turkish, Italian, Chinese, and of course British classics like fish and chips, because nothing says cultural variety like deep-fried cod.

Culver Square is the pedestrian-only hub of shopping. It's got clothes, bookshops, cafés, and more coffee chains than you'll ever need. Essentially, it's the only real shopping area in the city, so if you don't find what you're looking for there, best of luck.

For drinks, Three Wise Monkeys is a pub brewing its own beers, where one visit can easily turn into trying them all. Castle Park is the town's main green space, featuring Roman ruins, a Norman castle, and plenty of ducks, perfect for a picnic or just relaxing on the grass, wondering why you live in Essex.

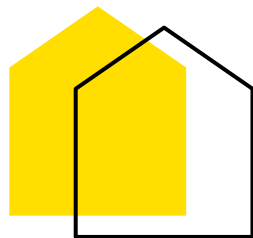
At night, Trilogy, Colchester's only nightclub, fills up with a mix of students and lively locals, while the pubs spill onto the streets with cheerful drinkers, chatty regulars,

and the occasional eccentric character adding colour to the scene.

For actual fun, there's Tenpin with its bowling and arcade games (50% off on Tuesdays btw). Next door, the Leisure Centre waterpark lets you risk your dignity on a waterslide.

Other attractions include Colchester Zoo, axe throwing, an escape room, Curzon and Odeon cinemas, Firstsite art gallery, and Mercury Theatre. For more active fun, there is AirHop trampoline park, mini golf, and the football stadium.

Your SU Membership



Your SU membership unlocks a world of opportunity:

Get a great degree + your dream job

Study support, revision tips, career advice. We've got your back.

Grow your own way. No pressure

Try new things, explore what matters to you, and take up opportunities that work for you.

Find your people. Feel at home

Events, mixers, Societies, clubs, volunteering; however you want to get involved, we'll help you find your people.

Use your voice. Make change happen

Run a campaign or just rant about the kettle. We'll help you speak up and lead the change.

Get support when you need it

Life happens. We're here for the ups, downs, and everything in between.

SU spaces that belong to you

This is your place.

Look for the house icon on campus – that's how you know it's an SU venue. From the SU Bar to the SU Advice, The Greenhouse Cafés to study spaces – if there's a house on the door, it's yours.

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