

# 'In Britain, feel at home'

Parul Gupta tells Payal Shah that as far as foreign students are concerned ~ apart from choosing the right university ~ drafting a strong yet honest application is the alpha and omega of success

**STUDYING** in the UK is a dream most students nourish. Parul Gupta, a graduate from the University of Leeds, former UK education consultant and founder and creative director of Mind the Gap, a blogsite for international students heading to, and in, the UK, has suggestions for international students on what concerns them most. Excerpts from an exclusive interview:

**How does one manage expenses in the UK?**

The tuition fee and accommodation costs are fixed, but there are various ways of meeting the cost of living. Students can stretch the pound through student cards and discount vouchers by booking in advance for travel, shopping at sales and other such ways. There are other ways, too, to manage finances and budget that students will find in the e-book posted on my site.

**How do students land jobs in Britain? Do they need a work permit?**

Students can now apply for a Tier 1 (post-study work visa) once they are graduates, provided they have the specific number of points and necessary maintenance of funds



to be eligible to do so. If they are granted the visa, they can stay in the UK for two years. Thereafter, they can apply to move to another schemes like Tier 2 or Tier 1(general).

While studying, students on degree programmes are allowed to work part-time for up to 20 hours during the term time, and full-time during holidays.

**How can students get assistance on the educational front like reference work and how best can they chalk out a study plan?**

Universities have libraries that can be accessed any time. Often these libraries permit students to avail of inter-library borrowing as well. They also have access to online journals and other reference material. Academics are usually a balance of seminars and lectures, and a great deal of self-study is encouraged.

**How can one find accommodation?**

Most universities guarantee university accommodation to international students provided they apply before the deadline. One can go for private accommodation, too. There are numerous websites that advertise rooms available. Certain factors should always be kept in mind while deciding on private or university accommodation. Since the importance given to these varies from person to person it's a little difficult to discuss these in general.

**What are the other problems foreign students usually face? How can these be dealt with?**

I think most students from India either find it difficult to manage finances or land a job. To find a job one needs to be aware of opportunities offered from varied places. Attending recruitment fairs, searching online, approaching employers directly and keeping in touch with the university career cell are just some of the things students should and can do.

**How can students get information about scholarships and other educational opportunities?**

The British Council is a useful source of information. Also contact the concerned university for information on scholarships it offers. Some private and public sector bodies also offer scholarships, and it's useful to keep a look out for advertisements for these in national dailies.

**There were lot of problems in the past as regards issuing of visa. Has the process got any easier?**

Under Tier 4 of the points-based system, student visa applicants need to demonstrate that they have the required points to be granted a visa. Also, where earlier a visa letter issued by the institute was sufficient, now it is compulsory that students include a confirmation of acceptance for studies reference number, in their application. The UK is carrying out stringent checks on both applications and sponsoring institutes. It is, therefore, important that every student confirms that the institute he or she is seeking a visa for, is licensed to sponsor.

**Asian students in the West have had to deal with quite a few problems in the past. Have things improved?**

I can't comment on behalf of anyone else, but personally I've never felt unsafe.

**Some vital tip you'd like to share with aspirants...**

If you have indeed decided to go to the UK to study, remember this is an opportunity of a lifetime. Choose an established university and make a strong yet honest application. Once you're there, make the most of your stay. Travel as much as you can, eat local food, explore Britain's culture, use the facilities universities provide. But all the while remember to give academics the topmost priority.