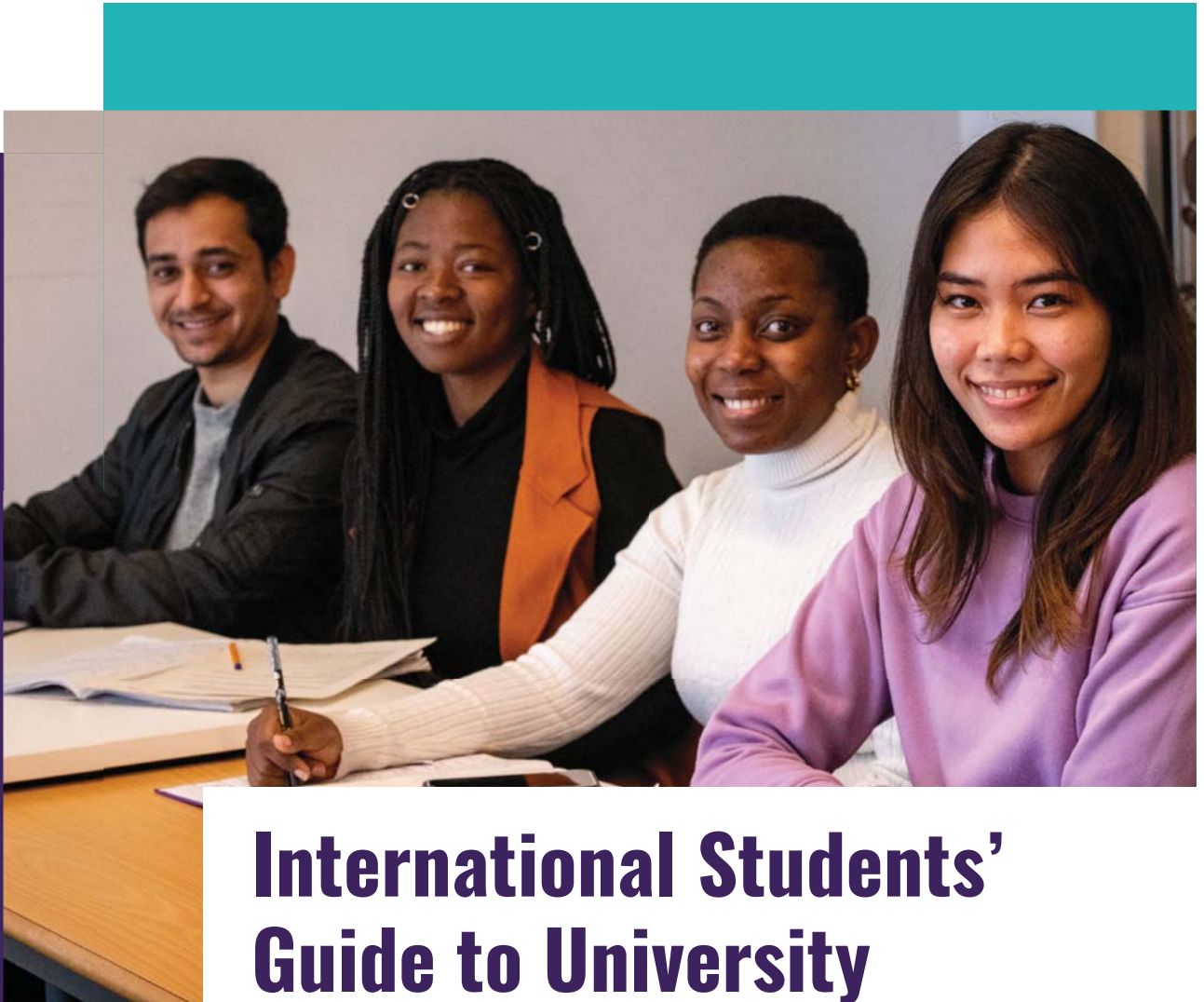




International Students' Guide to University Learning

September 2026

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A wide-angle photograph of the Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) Glasgow Campus. The image shows a modern, multi-story building with a mix of grey and white panels and large windows. A tall, dark blue tower with the GCU logo is prominent. To the right, there's a curved glass structure. In the foreground, a paved plaza with a checkered pattern has a few students walking. The sky is blue with some clouds.

Welcome to Glasgow Caledonian

We are excited to have you here and be part of our student body at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU).

We know it's a big leap to come and study in the UK, so this guide is to help familiarise you with what it's like to study at GCU and some of the study differences you may not be aware of.

The programme you are coming to study will belong to one of our three Schools, at our Glasgow Campus:

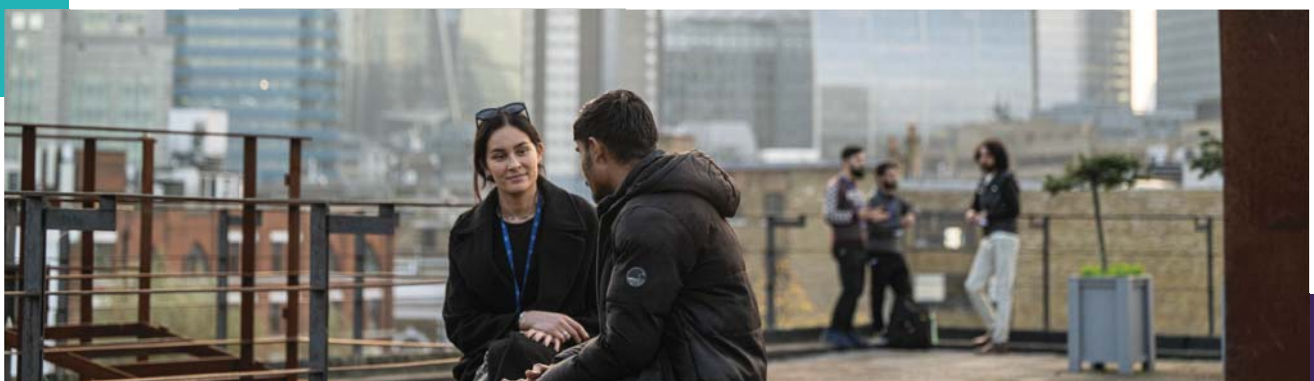
- The Glasgow School of Business and Society
- The School of Health and Life Sciences
- The School of Science and Engineering

Or your programme will be based within our London Campus.

This learning guide is for GCU students preparing to join us at any level and any campus.

Reading through this guide will provide you with introductory advice on preparing for the study within GCU and what to expect from UK Higher Education.

Whether you are a new international student or a returning international student, we hope you both enjoy and are challenged by your studies.



How will I learn?

People learn in different ways, and you are joining a learning environment that you might find quite different from what you have experienced before.

Your studies at GCU focus on developing your:

- Independence – so you can present, discuss, and make your points.
- Voice – so you have confidence in speaking and developing skills in the language and vocabulary of your degree.

Your Lectures are there to share your learning journey with you, to help build your independence, voice, and confidence.

Independent learning

At university your lecturers are not your only source of knowledge – you are expected to learn and read about a subject before and after a class.

You are also expected to develop a wider understanding of your subject through your reading and discussing ideas and concepts with other students and other people, even though you may be assessed only on small parts of this.

Remember that your degree is not just about the grades for your assessments – your learning will come from your own studies and the conversations you have in class, via email and meetings with your lecturers and others.

You will experience learning in ways you both like and enjoy and other ways that may be more difficult for you. If you do find things difficult, you can get support and help from your lecturers and the [Learning Development Centres \(LDCs\)](#) based in each School. You will achieve greater academic success by embracing challenges and developing personalised strategies that work for you to overcome them. In doing this you will find your way to make sense of the 'newness' and hopefully create lasting change in how you learn.

Student-centred learning

You may be joining your studies at the start of your degree programme Year 1 (Level 1) student – or you may be joining at the start of Year 2 (Level 2) or Year 3 (Level 3) as an advanced entry international student.

You may also be joining as a postgraduate student to study a taught Masters course or as a research postgraduate student.

Whether you are joining as a Year 1, 2 or 3, a taught or research postgraduate student, GCU has a strong student-centred approach to learning regardless of what you are studying. This means we emphasise the importance of focusing upon your needs as a learner.

Student-centred learning tends to use innovative methods of teaching to promote and support your learning through communication with lecturers and other learners. You are an active participant in your own learning as you develop transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking.



Lectures and Seminars

Lectures and seminars may be different from what you have experienced in your home country. Your attendance is mandatory and monitored, but don't assume your lecturer will be available at the end of your classes as they often have other lessons to teach.

Lectures

Lectures are more formal information sessions which usually last 1 hour, they are often large and would normally take place in one of the main lecture theatres. In a lecture, you are usually expected to sit quietly, listen, and take notes, unless asked otherwise.

Lecture Essentials:

- Make sure you attend (even if you are busy, don't understand the subject, or are too tired)
- Prepare by doing the reading and reviewing any presentations (this reduces the notes you need to take and improves your understanding)
- Be prepared to ask questions, this is how you gain understanding.
- Make effective notes

Seminars

Seminars are less formal learning sessions, in smaller groups, which usually last 1 hour. Your lecturer is likely to expect you to ask questions about or comment on topics being discussed during seminars, workshops or tutorials. Don't worry about getting things wrong – seminars are for trying out your ideas and learning from each other. Also, don't be afraid to look at your tutor in the eye – this is polite and expected behaviour.

Participation in these sessions is generally required. In a seminar, however, be prepared to contribute by:

- adding your thoughts to a group discussion
- answering questions asked by the tutor
- asking questions if necessary



Lecturers/Tutors appreciate:

- Politeness (in both written and verbal communication)
- Showing an interest in the subject by actively listening and responding to questions
- Doing the homework
- Attending lectures/seminars
- Participating in seminars/tutorials
- Making use of the help and support offered.

Lecturers/Tutors dislike:

- Not attending appointments
- Arriving late
- Not attending lectures/seminars (without a valid reason), then expecting lecturers to give extra help
- Talking and not paying attention in lectures
- Not doing the reading/preparation work

The structure of your degree

Most degree programmes are made up of modules which are taught in a trimester. Some modules are compulsory for your programme, and some may be optional – which means that they are open for you to choose what you wish to study.

Some of these modules will be taught in one trimesters, whilst others will be taught across both trimesters. You will be able to speak to your Programme Leader in more detail about this and where appropriate, what choices you will have in your programme.

Undergraduate courses are normally studied in levels, where each level of study contributes both credits and a part of your final grade outcome. Some students (such as Exchange students) may only study part of a level with the University. Your credits and grade contribution will vary across the programmes you take. Postgraduate taught courses are similarly built up of modules, with the grades from assessments contributing towards your final degree/award outcome.



Communication at the University

Communication is a vital skill at university to ensure that you understand others and can be understood by those you are communicating with, both in person and online.

In the UK, we use first names and surnames (or 'family names'). We put our first names before our surnames. Most people would expect everyone to call them by their first names.

Communicating with staff

Most academic staff in the UK will be on first names terms with students, so you don't need to address them as 'Sir' or 'Professor'. It is also important to be polite to all members of staff – that means using "please", "thank you", "sorry", "excuse me", etc.

Communicating with students

You will meet with students from many different cultures at GCU, it is important to be polite and communicate respectfully towards them. Some students may not speak as much, this doesn't mean they do not want to contribute, they may just need more time to process the information. They may tackle group work differently to you, so try and establish group rules. It is important to be sensitive to others and realise that they might have a different understanding or perspective.

Email communication

Staff should reply to your emails within 5 working days (unless they are on annual leave). This will be in office hours – Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm. Weekends, bank holidays and periods when the University is closed do not constitute as working days.

You are advised to check your module handbooks or information on GCU Learn before contacting staff to see if your query has already been answered.

Staff should only be contacted by email and not any other platform, like social media or direct messaging.

Email Etiquette

- It is better to be too formal than too informal
- Avoid using shorthand
- Use correct grammar and complete sentences.
- Make sure your email is appropriate and professional
- Always check you have got the right email address
- Don't write in capital letters in block text, this is considered as shouting to the reader.
- Remember to be polite

Further information

For further information on studying at GCU please [click on this link](#).



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Contact: **Campus Life Desk**
Email: studentsupport@gcu.ac.uk

 **GCU Student Life**

[gcu.ac.uk/students/studentlife/events](https://www.gcu.ac.uk/students/studentlife/events)