

Late Arrivals from Gaza - University Best Practices

From CAS to study to visa extensions

This document has been put together by the **Gaza Scholarship Initiative (GSI)** and **UK Coalition for Gaza Students**, with the support of students from the 2025 cohort, in particular those arriving at Glasgow University, UCL, and Sussex. It was compiled with the help of colleagues from the University of Leicester, Imperial College London, Sussex University, and Phoenix Space. It draws on data from all 2025 arrivals, and feedback from more than 80 scholars currently awaiting evacuation.

It has been put together rapidly to share information and best practice in support of a second cohort of Gaza Scholars facing late arrival. As with our previous Best Practices in Support of Gaza Students, examples are drawn from the efforts of Universities across the United Kingdom.

NB: No university implemented or innovated *all* of the best practices identified in this document. The aim of compilation is to assist Higher Education Institutions and those supporting students in their efforts to access education, and demonstrate what has been possible across the sector.

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Executive Summary

- In 2025 all universities receiving Gaza Students were able to accommodate late arrivals using a variety of tools (inc: 1:1 support, delayed assessment, swapped semesters, visa extensions)
- In 2025 40% of students arrived late or very late for their autumn classes
- Government evacuations for Gaza scholars support access to education for top students. Delays are out of the control of all parties, and all efforts should be made to ensure Autumn arrival
- Formal deferral to January with new CAS dates renders students ineligible for evacuation

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Late Arrivals in 2025 – no student left behind

In 2025, a total of 103 students were evacuated, **53 students (51.4%) arrived late for their semesters**. The median delay after their specified date was 39 days (Range: 9 - 107 days). Late students arrived in the UK on October 22, November 19, November 24, and December 15. Additionally, two (PhD) students arrived on January 26, 2026.

None of these students had their places of study withdrawn for late arrival. While one student arriving in 2025 was asked to change their programme and was issued a new CAS, they worked closely with their institution on arrival and remained in their desired programme. Importantly, **while a new CAS was issued, it was never used.**

Zero students were asked to withdraw their visa applications, and zero students were issued a new CAS for a January start. According to both the 2025 and 2026 evacuation policies, a CAS with a January start date would make a student **ineligible for evacuation to the UK.**

Just as in 2026, during the 2025 evacuations the UK Government position encouraged universities to make all accommodations possible for students to start on their original programmes despite late arrival.

All students who arrived late agree that while their typical education route was disrupted, and they would have preferred to arrive on time and even ahead of time for class, **late arrival and access to education was far better than being denied the privilege.**

Sector best practice from 2025, is to extend last arrival dates and accommodate late arrivals. The mechanisms by which universities met this challenge are detailed in the later sections of this report.

2026 Challenges

By mid-October 2026, there have also been two evacuations (August 26 and September 14), **but only approximately 23% of all eligible students** (compared with more than 48% having arrived this time last year) **have arrived in the UK**, so at least 20% more students will arrive late to campus. There has also been a significant interval (more than one month) between evacuations, leading institutions to worry about just when students may arrive. Compared with 2025, when universities

received regular communications by government, and evacuations proceeded at regular intervals (Sept17, Sept 29, Oct 22, Nov 19, Nov 24, and Dec15, etc).

At the time of writing, 60% of universities with students still in Gaza have written to their scholars to update them about arrival procedures. The majority of universities have made similar accommodations to 2025; unfortunately, **a minority of institutions have told their scholars that they may no longer be able to support their arrival**, or are **suggesting that they should *formally* switch programmes for a January start date**, or have even **initiated the withdrawal of their CAS**. **This may mean students are not eligible for evacuation from the UK Government**, as evacuation is only available for students with Autumn start dates. Some of the issues flagged by students include:

"Because of the evacuation delay, the university said the last date I can arrive is October 23rd."

"The university initially suggested deferring my studies until January 2027. However, I explained my concerns that this could affect my eligibility for evacuation from Gaza, as the proposed start date would fall after 31 December. The team was very understanding and kindly agreed to keep the deferral decision on hold until I arrive in the UK. My main challenge remains the uncertainty surrounding my evacuation and arrival, which is beyond my control."

"I got this from my school and I am devastated: 'As advised, we checked your CAS today and it was still showing as Assigned,¹ meaning no visa decision has been made. This means it is now too late for you to be able to join us this intake as you cannot get a visa decision in time to arrive on campus before the last registration deadline on Monday, 12th October. We have now withdrawn your CAS so please cancel your visa application as quickly as possible.'"

The bodies compiling this report are **gravely concerned about the likelihood that unconsidered actions at this phase may risk scholars' access to education**. This also goes against advice from the Gaza Departures Team.

If you are looking into January entry **please do not have students withdraw applications without formal advice from the Government's Departures Team including assurances that they will be evacuated**. Government should communicate this assurance to students directly.

¹ It's important to note that "assigned" isn't an accurate representation of where the student is in the visa application process. The student quoted above and over 60 others have already received the first email from the Gaza Departures Team, which confirms that the British government will work towards arranging their exit from Gaza. This is akin to a visa approval in principle, dependent on the successful enrolment of biometrics in Jordan. Not one of the 140 students who have transited through Jordan since 2025 to enrol their biometrics has been refused entry to the UK.

Once a student receives this first email, the British government then submits the student's information to the relevant Israeli and Jordanian authorities requesting permission to leave Gaza and transit through Jordan with onward travel to the UK for the purpose of study. Once permission has been secured, the Gaza Departures Team sends a second email to each student confirming a date of departure.

We strongly urge that, for late arriving students:

- **No scholar be asked to withdraw their visa application**
- **No scholar have their CAS withdrawn**
- **No scholar lose their scholarship funding**

The Best Practices outlined in the sections below demonstrate how students can thrive even under non-ideal study circumstances in the UK. At times, beginning formal assessment in January is the best way forward, but it is critical that **visa and CAS documentation clearly state that study was meant to begin in Autumn 2026, otherwise students will be made ineligible for evacuation**. To reiterate, government eligibility criteria clearly state that scholars with a start date after 2026 are not eligible for evacuation assistance.

Why are things different this year?

While the UK Government announced its intention to carry out evacuations for a 2026 cohort earlier than for the 2025 cohort (June 2026 vs August / September 2025), the announcement was still too late to give UK universities adequate time to prepare. Many waited until they were certain of a new evacuation before announcing scholarships, and the uncertainty also meant that for others there was not sufficient staffing or resources in place to handle the needs of a new cohort.

Much like 2025, scholarship providers reported delays in announcing places as donors and partner universities held off decision making until government plans for evacuation were securely in place. Once an unconditional offer *and* funding have been secured, both the student and the institution should begin planning for departure.

Students and eligible dependents needing passports, however, were unable to reach this stage due to complications around passport issuance for Gaza residents. The broader context of infrastructural devastation in Gaza as well as the lack of a clear protocol for passport issuance caused severe delays in processing times (up to three months). Applicants had no way to have passports expedited. At the same time, eligible child dependents have been denied the right to apply for a passport at all, forcing students to separate from their families or defer their offers. Delays due to poor internet and difficulties getting other forms of documentation persist from 2025.

Best Practices for late arriving students

Extending Last Arrival Dates on the CAS

In 2025, 24 universities extended the latest arrival date for students beyond the average latest start date for autumn semester. This was done through the Sponsor Management System at the request of the UK government. A CAS is valid for six months after its date of issue and should remain valid until scholars arrive in the UK. A university should NOT need to issue a new CAS to extend arrival.

Unlike other international students, students from Gaza depend on a multitude of factors completely beyond their control in order to arrive at their campuses on time. For this reason, they should be considered outside the normal agreed date of last arrival for international students (usually approx. three weeks into term). As the evacuation dates are later and usually announced with short notice, **best practice is to proactively preempt this and get agreement for an extended latest arrival date.** Agreeing this in advance for all cohorts removes potential delays when it is essential to move quickly.

UKVI Compliance

While compliance teams have flagged the issue of late arrivals, this has been managed with regular communication between Key Contacts, Departments, and Compliance. Program leads should be kept informed about efforts to engage students in pre-arrival study (asynchronous) as well as the escalating possibilities of assessment deferral, mentorship, and visa extensions (see below).

"The fact that the government's own Gaza Departures Team is advising us to push the last arrival date holds quite a bit of" sway, so compliance has moved the last start date to the end of November.

In 2025, despite late and very late arrivals, there were no compliance issues for Universities.

For 2025 entry, as the visa expiry was January 2027, this gave a buffer to allow for resits after the standard registration ended in September 2026. This was acknowledged and understood ahead of the scholars arriving (the final scholar arrived 1 December 2025), allowing the latest arrival date for these students to move from mid October (standard) to early December.. Whilst students missed almost the whole first term, pre-arrival study helped, and most students focused on T2 when they arrived. Then the missed module/assessments were picked up immediately

after the course ended, safe in the knowledge that the visa covered them until January 2027. At the point of writing no visas have been/expect to be extended.

Study Before Arrival

Students who were best able to settle into their programs despite late arrival, had clear commitment to students' safe arrival within government policy parameters, and communication from their universities and course leaders.

Communication can be from all levels: admissions, student experience, course conveners, and (perhaps especially) peers. Connecting incoming students with current students in advance of arriving was incredibly helpful for a number of universities who received late arrivals in 2025.

According to one institution:

This year's cohort have been able to connect with current scholars from Gaza before arriving in the UK, and they have explained the process of late arrival. It has eased everyone's fears.

Online Access

Unfortunately, UK regulations about in-person education have prohibited or at least strictly limited the use of online learning for students in Gaza arriving late. However, students from many universities in 2025 were given access to some readings and background material so they could mentally prepare themselves for the world of study they would enter into.

When students arrived at Leicester (as one example) a designated person from each module was made available to consult with and provide support for each student who had come from Gaza.

Best practice is to connect late arriving students to their peers in the UK (either alumni or current arrivals) and provide whatever materials are available so they can keep up.

1:1 Mentorship

"Over the Christmas break, we had people from the course available to answer questions at specific times."

Many institutions found ways of providing 1:1 mentorship. This at times came from classmates in the Islamic Students Society or PalSoc groups, and often more formally included PhD students, RAs or tutors who would meet at set intervals to go over material with late arriving Gaza students. Course conveners and even lecturers would set extra check-ins with students to make sure they were on track.

Shuffling Coursework

In some cases students arrived so late into term that they were unable to productively participate in the autumn semester. This can cause a host of knock on issues in particular around courses that are full year or that build formatively on each other. Below are a few ways that institutions innovated to make sure scholars were able to stay on track where necessary, and were given the space to re-do (do) courses at other times where possible.

Autumn Audit

The students have coped remarkably well, but starting so late was a huge challenge on all sides and one we really hope can be avoided this year (but we are already concerned about the dates being pushed back again into November).

Students at one university who arrived in November, missed out on key information that they needed for dissertation work:

"Our T1 and T2 modules feed into the dissertation, so this was tricky, but students focussed on catching up on the main core modules that would be needed for the dissertation. They were then enrolled in T1 again (which requires a waiver of fees for that period from Registry) and will undertake the term 1 assessments now they are in a better place to do this. However the dissertation was submitted on time with their peers. "

As we see above, mixed methods can be productively deployed, allowing students to focus on progressive learning and submit dissertations with their cohort, while also ensuring that additional taught material is made available.

Autumn Assignment Deferral

Where it was not possible to miss or defer coursework for late arriving Gaza students, some institutions helped students catch up on learning, but deferred the submission of assignments until the summer term, or the resit period. This allowed

students to focus on content during term time, and gave them breathing room so they did not have to think about assessment.

Deferred Thesis Submission

Thesis submission was often moved around or extended. Some students completed with their peers, others had submission over the summer, in the resit period from T2, or the following January.

"Students were able to extend their registration until the end of January 2026, to enable them to submit the thesis late, catching up on the missed T1 the following autumn, and stay within the visa which expires at the end of January. This meant there was no visa extension needed."

Formal Registration for Following Autumn

While all agree that this is a last resort, as it incurs additional cost for a university, more than half a dozen UK universities have formally registered late arriving students for study the autumn after arrival on one year taught masters programmes. This means the opportunity to re-sit Term 1 courses. This option does typically require a fee waiver from registry or discussion with scholarship providers.

This can be used in conjunction with other accommodations to allow for on-time thesis submission so that students can make the most of cohort building.

Visa Extensions

At least two universities availed themselves of the visa extension option for their late arriving students. In one case this was paid for by the Scholarship Provider, and in the other case the University VC approved the expenditure.

Student visa extension applications are available on the UKVI website. The duration is typically for six months.

- Scholarship providers issued new sponsorship letters covering the new duration of study.
- Universities issued a new CAS.

Once students submitted their applications (paid for again either by the university or the scholarship provider) at a cost of £1,000, universities reached out to UKVI and

submitted an explanation as to why students needed an extension. Universities were transparent, stating that students were evacuated late from Gaza and needed time to complete their study.

This is a protocol that is typically only used for students who failed their semester (often due to extenuating circumstances). ALL applications put in for Gaza students under this option were approved. They took approximately 8 weeks to be processed.

GSI & the UK Coalition can provide templates of these documents upon request.

Risks

Most of the risks to the mitigations outlined above are financial. There is a cost for the visa application, there is a cost to the university for fee waivers or the scholarship body for additional tuition fees, and an additional cost for housing or stipend depending on the date of student arrival and the duration of extension sought.

Administratively this also involves time and energy from staff. Key contacts for Gaza students had to liaise with departments, ensure housing was secured, and help mitigate the disruption for students.

Mitigations

Where possible, universities and scholarship bodies should suspend payment of stipends until arrival and pro-rate them from the new arrival date. This would also be the case for accommodation, where possible. Close coordination with scholarship providers helps smooth the process.

Lessons Learned / Recommendations

The ideal situation would be for the UK government to commit to annual evacuations until or unless students are able to travel freely, or to continue departure assistance for a stated number of years. This would allow universities to adequately plan and staff the incredible initiatives that they have set up, and take forward from the many lessons learned. This would also mitigate significant obstacles like passport issuance delays and give students time to navigate the changing landscape that defines Gaza.

Having managed this process in 2025, it was relatively more straightforward for 2026, as key players and decision makers knew what to expect. The success of the first cohort also helped. Less frequent departures this year, however, means there continues to be uncertainty and anxiety.

As is often reiterated, the evacuation process for Gaza students is complex and relies on multiple external actors to proceed. The same is true, however, for the many actors who must work in concert to ensure that students thrive on their educational journey. This collective of institutions, scholarship providers, student societies and voluntary bodies have absorbed the uncertainties of the evacuation process and the UK Government's uncertain commitment to the future of the programme. It is past time for more cohesive and transparent communication.

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