University Best Practices for Mobility of Palestinian Students from Gaza:

From Admissions to Post-Graduation

Compiled by the **Gaza Scholarship Initiative (GSI)** and **UK Coalition for Gaza Students**, with the support of the sanctuary staff at **King's College London** and the **University of Leicester**. Special thanks to Paul Webb (KCL), Aleks Palanac (Leicester) Katya Ivanova (LSE) for their assistance in compiling this report. Thanks to Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (UCL) and Eleftheria Ktenas (UCL), Alison Phips (Glasgow) and the Glasgow Sanctuary team for championing the work documented here, and of course Soha Abu Eid and Abdallah Ramadan who have persistently led this work for, and as, Gaza scholars.

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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.

1 April 2026

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Introduction

In 2025, 37 universities across the UK welcomed more than 100 scholars from Gaza, who were evacuated with the assistance of the UK government (see the UK policy here). The same year, the UK listed assistance for Gaza scholars as a milestone in its UK International Education Strategy, noting that:

> *"The UK is also proud to support the mobility of academics and students including those recently impacted by global crises such as those in Ukraine and Gaza."*

This mobility did not start or end with evacuations. It began during the application process, as universities gathered to champion safe passage for their students, in arrival preparations, academic support, and assistance in transitioning out of study and into work, internships, and PhD research.

This document compiles the best practices of UK universities, and reflects a broad team that assisted, in some capacity, all of the arriving Gaza students. It reflects knowledge of how institutions across the sector made administrative adaptations to ensure access, as well as the impact of those adaptations on students applying, arriving, and studying. This draws on and adds to work from the Scottish Government on access to education for those in conflict settings, and the work that the Scottish Government has done to ensure the safety of its Gaza scholars in particular.

All recommendations issued here have been solutions deployed by at least three universities in the UK. We know that universities look to each other to establish sector best practice, and so compiled here are the cumulative efforts of UK HEIs so that their efforts can be recorded and amplified. It must also be noted at the outset that if it were not for the vocal and persistent requests by UK universities to government at all levels, asking that their scholars be given access to their campuses in 2025, it is unlikely that government assistance for safe passage out of Gaza would have been provided. Mobility and access for Gaza scholars was *made possible* by UK universities. The work of the Gaza Scholarship Initiative (GSI) to connect institutions, share best practices, and amplify their calls for student mobility is ultimately reflected in the present document.

This document is meant as a useful tool to support a hoped-for second cohort of scholars from Gaza for autumn 2026, and as an institutional reference for supporting scholars in areas of conflict more generally.

If you have questions relating to any of these best practices, or want to be put in touch with university administrators who have authorised them, please get in touch directly with the writers of this report, whose email is listed at the end of the document.

Why a 2026 cohort?

Following the arrival of more than 100 scholars from Gaza in 2025, the UK remains a top choice for young scholars in Gaza seeking to build their futures through education. Most universities in Gaza stopped classes in October 2023, and by January 2024, the Israeli military had systematically destroyed every single higher education institution. While teaching has restarted online and even in tents where possible, education at the university level has been severely disrupted, and in most cases, the facilities for teaching and training simply no longer exist.

Efforts to reinstate teaching and higher education have never stopped, but damage to infrastructure even beyond the university buildings themselves has made a resumption of education at previous levels impossible. This is first and foremost because of the mass displacement that the vast majority of the population in Gaza have suffered from. More than half of the population of Gaza is currently displaced in the southern desert known as Al-Mawasi, where there is little to no infrastructure. Beyond the difficulties in accessing food, clean water, and electricity, most don't have reliable wifi, or must travel long distances over unsafe terrain to access basic let alone specific services. The majority of students no longer have access to a personal computer and therefore complete applications on a mobile phone. With severe limitations still imposed on imports, this is not likely to change in the short or medium term. The banking sector also collapsed in 2024, with severe restrictions placed on international payments.

Students applying to UK universities are top professionals and high school graduates. They are seeking access to the resources, facilities, and knowledge networks of UK higher education; they want to contribute and to be part of a wider conversation. They are also seeking certainty and stability, and a way to secure their own futures, both personally and professionally. While students have endured atrocities beyond what most people could ever imagine, they look to the future and are determined to fashion it in a way that suits them as best as possible.

For many students, the only reasonable way to continue education is going abroad. There are other ways to support education in Gaza, however, and we encourage those with the means to connect with organisations and initiatives like Taawon's ISNAD programme, the LINES4Palestine project, and the Friends of Palestinian Universities' soon-to-be launched consortium of UK HEIs promoting collaboration with Palestinian universities (UK-PAL) that are working to support the reconstruction of the higher education sector in Gaza through sustainable partnership with universities abroad.

Admissions

Universities were asked if they would be willing to continue support for students from Gaza, and answered a resounding yes. Given this continued support, the sections below lay out how students can be assisted, from the admissions phase to after graduation.

Admissions support begins by being able to adequately assess *who* needs assistance. Best practice here is to add 'location of domicile' to applications so that students who need support can be identified. Once you have a list of applicants, there are several areas of best practice to be aware of:

Letters of Recommendation

Due to the ongoing displacement in Gaza, professors and lecturers are not always available on a deadline. Some may not have internet access, be hospitalised, or have been killed over the course of the genocide.

**Best Practice is accepting a generic letter, an outdated letter, or a letter addressed to a different university, or letters from relevant non-academic professionals.*

Transcripts

For the same reasons listed above, semesters can drag on and PG applicants may not have final transcripts ready at the time of application. This may also be due to a student's inability to pay university fees in order to obtain the transcripts.

**Best Practice is allowing deans and department heads to send projected grades with final grades delivered as soon as the student is able to do so.*

Proof of English

Proof of English is often one of the more difficult conditions for students inside Gaza to satisfy due to the absence of official language testing facilities, poor wifi connections, difficulty charging batteries due to limited electricity, old or damaged equipment, and dangerous roads leading to internet hubs that are crowded and costly, among other challenges.

Due to the many complexities around language testing, we direct you to Pal-EAP's forthcoming *Guidelines for Universities* for showing flexibility in evidencing English language level for Gaza students.

**Best Practice is writing a policy for all international students who are unable to access language exams due to conflict so that it can be applied to every student consistently. We link here to a template to write a policy for your university.*

In the shorter term, universities in 2025 accepted *Language of Instruction* documentation, the Duolingo English Test (many were able to offer free codes), expired test scores, or flexible internal university examinations. Many HEIs have started using the Oxford ELLT as the most robust alternative that also works for students in Gaza given its tolerance for drops in connectivity among other factors.

What to be Aware of for Undergraduates

Undergraduate applicants from Gaza face a separate set of challenges in addition to those listed above. Specifically they relate to grade equivalence and the cost and availability of standardised testing centres. These challenges may in part explain why the 2025 cohort included less than 15 undergraduate students.

The *tawjihi*, Palestine's standard high school leaving certificate, is not equivalent to UK A-levels. Consequently, Palestinian students must either have an IB diploma or take a foundation year before starting an undergraduate degree programme in the UK. Foundation year courses that are not integrated into undergraduate study put students in a separate visa category – Tier 6 instead of Tier 7. Unlike Tier 6, in which the university can assess the student's language competency, Tier 7 requires UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) to assess it via a Secure English Language Test (SELT), but there are no SELT test centres in Gaza.

**Best Practice is ensuring that offers are made for integrated foundation year programmes that are on the same CAS as a degree programme.*

Alternatively, universities could consider admitting exceptional undergraduate students directly into their chosen degree programmes so long as the student is enrolled in their first semester at a university in Gaza. This would allow the student to be assessed at the university level. On completion of the first semester, the student could provide official transcripts and grade projections for the second semester. Letters from deans and department heads projecting grades based on university courses undertaken in Gaza were used successfully by UK universities to admit undergraduates for the 2025 / 26 academic year.

Many undergraduate courses also require standardised tests, such as the TMUA for computer science students. Most of these exams are either too costly or are simply not possible to take in Gaza for the same reasons as those outlined in the Proof of English section. For those students who can afford the cost of these exams, banking restrictions and the collapse of Gaza's banking sector have made it impossible for students to make international payments.

**Best Practice is offering free test codes to displaced students. If an exam does not have an advertised policy of giving out free test codes, it is worth asking.*

It is important to note that efforts are ongoing to help establish reliable and accessible test centres. If your applicants reach out with concerns, you can direct them to GSI (contact at end of document) to find out the latest on these efforts.

Acceptance Fees / Deposits

For the reasons listed above, most students are also unable to pay acceptance fees. Many do not know they can request a waiver or deferral, so it is helpful to reach out and let students know that this is an option at your institution.

**Best Practice is waiving the fee altogether or at the very least, requiring it only once the student has secured a scholarship. In this case, payment would need to be made from outside of Gaza, either by the university or by the scholarship provider.*

Passport Issuing and Renewal

A student's offer in the UK can be conditional on holding a valid passport. Where students have lost documents or passports are nearing expiry, this condition cannot be met easily or quickly. This is due to the Palestinian Authority's halt on processing passports and national IDs for Gaza residents, in place since the beginning of 2025. While obtaining a valid passport is often not something that a university can help with, when students do raise the issue, it is good to be aware and to know what *might* be done to help.

The Palestinian Authority *has* made exceptions for some students with confirmed offers, but requests for these exceptions have relied almost solely on personal connections. This route is labour intensive, often involves long wait times, and is by no means guaranteed, causing students great anxiety and concern about potentially losing an offer.

In cases where the student's passport expires shortly after the start of the degree programme, it is important to emphasise that the UK has no strict minimum number of months required for a passport to be valid when entering the UK on a student visa, so long as it is valid on entry to the UK. The university should consider the passport valid in this case to make an unconditional offer.

**Best Practice is not conditioning the offer on passport renewal as this is something that can be done through the Palestinian Embassy once the student enters the UK.*

Scholarships

The 2025 **evacuation protocol was made available only to students with "fully funded, verifiable, scholarships".** Verifiable funding can only come from an "official financial sponsor", which is defined by UKVI as the British government, the applicant's national government, the British Council, the UK university where the student has an offer, or any international organisation, company or university.

These requirements have resulted in the following:

1) Levels of funding generally had to be over and above the UKVI set minimums. While scholarships providing the required funds (nine months of living expenses at UKVI rates plus tuition for each year) were accepted, it has generally cost far more to support scholars.

2) Self-funded students and students with private sponsorship were unable to take up their offers (see Private Fundraising and Scholarship Eligibility section below).

Where universities or verified scholarship bodies were offering funding, it was essential that scholarship award letters included the following:

- A clear statement that tuition and maintenance fees are covered in full for the entire period of the programme, i.e. three to five years for BA or PhD students.
- Highlighting on the scholarship award letter that the student will receive at least the recommended minimum for the nine months suggested by UKVI for living expenses: Those figures are £13,761 for students inside London and £10,539 for students outside London. These figures must be mentioned in the award letter even where the university is providing students with free accommodation. Failing to give these figures resulted in delays for students.

Beyond Minimum Criteria

When considering the funding needs of Gaza students, it should be noted that a key feature of their exit from Gaza in 2025 was that they left with nothing but a small bag carrying their mobile phone and charger (if they didn't leave it behind with family), documents and medicine. The Israeli authorities stipulated that no clothing, cash, laptops, or personal items would be permitted through the crossing. This is why funds had to be made available in cash or as a gift card on arrival in Jordan and in the UK for essentials until stipends kicked in. Also critical, is that the UK government invoiced universities for the evacuations at the end of the financial year (approx 2k/person).

**Best Practice is to offer support to the level outlined below.*

- Visa and International Health Surcharge (IHS), paid directly by university or scholarship provider.
- Flights & accommodation in the transit country.***

- University fees (institutional-wide fee concession or home fees where possible).
- Living costs bursary (12 months per year of degree programme).
- Graduate visa or work placement costs, especially for Master's students****

Sample Scholarship Calculator

Masters/Taught Post-Graduate Degree Costs (12 months)	
Visa application fee + IHS	£558 + £1,164* = 1722
Travel to campus [flights, accommodation, etc]	£2,000*** (2025 costs, subject to change)
University fees	£18,000-46,000**
Living costs outside of London	£15,000**
Living costs (London)	£20,000**
Arrivals support	£1,000 (based on 2025 costs)
Graduate Route visa fee + IHS (2 yrs, pre-Jan/2027)	£937 + £2,070 = £3,007 ****
Graduate Route visa fee + IHS (1.5 yrs, post-Jan/2027)	£937 + £1,552.50 = £2,489.50

* IHS for students is £776 / year. Undergraduate students in most of the UK pay three years plus five months (£2,652), while students in Scotland pay four years and five months (£3,427.50). Postgraduate Master's students usually pay for 1.5 years (i.e., 1.5 x 776 = £1,164). PhD students usually pay for 4.5 years (i.e., 4.5 x 776 = £3,492.
**This will be per year for courses more than 12 months.
*** For the 2025 cohort, the UK government paid upfront costs for departure and arrival to the UK; universities were invoiced for these costs at a later date, and where costs were for the evacuation of dependents, individual students were invoiced. If the route out of Gaza changes, the costs would also change. As students generally cannot afford these costs, *best practice is to budget for them in advance to avoid getting caught out*. In some cases, universities have offered to loan the students the up-front cost and be paid back over the course of their studies.
**** Graduate visas are currently valid for two years; however, any applications submitted after 1 January 2027 will only be given a max of 1.5 years for a Graduate visa. IHS is paid at a rate of £1,035/year. It is, of course, preferable to assist students directly into work or further study. Where this is an option, funds set aside for the Graduate visa might be used via careers support or assisted sponsorship for eligible work visas. Please see Post Graduate Support below.

Private Fundraising and Scholarship Eligibility

UK civil society is invested in the success of Gaza scholars seeking a future through education. Well before the announcement of government evacuation support, individuals and NGOs were working to fundraise in support of education for Gaza students. Once government support was announced, it became clear that not all funds raised could be used. Below is an overview of common pitfalls and best practice.

The nature of government support and requirement that students have full scholarships from verifiable sources meant that simply having funds was not sufficient to support student education in the UK. There were students with unconditional offers and money in place who would have been eligible for a UK visa under normal circumstances, but who were not eligible for evacuation in 2025 because the funds were not in place as verified scholarships. There have been two successful workarounds from the NGO / foundation sector.

Gift Agreements: Civil society groups teamed up with local NGOs to raise funds and coordinated agreements with universities known as a 'gift agreement'. This meant that raised funds were gifted to universities who could then offer scholarships directly to support eligible students, which could then be listed on the CAS.

Eligible NGO / Foundation / Company: Other successful instances of civil society support came from groups affiliated with international organisations (NGO, foundation, company) where funds came from employees, employer matching schemes, etc. These groups raised funds and were able to issue scholarship letters from the organisation directly. These were few in number. The official guidance states that the funds must be verified and from recognised scholarship providers. It has not been entirely clear what kind of organisation is eligible, beyond being an international organisation with offices in more than one national location and/or having an interest / track record in education support.

As a note of caution, while students have widely used crowd-funding campaigns, the funds raised here are not accepted by NGOs, foundations or universities. Other fundraisers set up bank accounts in students' names, but since self-funded students did not qualify for support, this could only be used as support once a student arrived.

Visa Eligibility & Pre-Departure

While it is unclear whether the UK government will support the safe exit of Gaza scholars for a 2026/7 cohort, uncertainty should not mean inaction. Best practice for the 2025 students was early action; this gave students a chance to navigate the UKVI system (applications for biometric predetermination) and make official requests for their safe exit. Given that it took five months from the time of the government announcement of support and the last bus of students, the sooner decisions are made the better. Given this, best practice has been identified as the following:

Once an unconditional offer *and* funding have been secured, both the student and the institution should begin planning for departure.

A Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) letter is required to complete a student visa application. The university can issue it up to six months in advance of the "sponsorship start date", which aligns closely with the start date of the course. Likewise, a student can submit a visa application up to six months in advance of the sponsorship start date, which is listed on the CAS. This is important because the UK government only offered departure support in 2025 to those students whose UK university had issued the CAS and had informed the government that it had done so (for more on the mechanisms of the 2025 evacuations see Departure from Gaza below).

Despite the cost and limited numbers of CASs a university can issue, experience tells us that the UK government is more likely to respond positively to the needs of the sector to plan ahead if it knows that Gaza offerholders are officially eligible for a visa. This is similarly true in the case that borders allow for free (or more) movement, or a Visa Application Center for the UK re-opens in Gaza. Borders remain unpredictable and the more time a student has to navigate this the better.

**Best practice is therefore to issue the CAS document as early as possible.*

It is crucial that the CAS accurately reflects the student's full funding. In the event that the CAS is issued before a scholarship offer is confirmed, it must be updated to include a sponsor note clearly indicating full funding. This is essential to avoid any delays in visa processing. The funding details should be stated clearly and consistently, in line with the information outlined in the Scholarships section above.

While CASs expire within six months of being issued, where students were going to arrive late, the government did show discretion in 2025 as arrival was dependent on factors outside of student's or university's control.

Before issuing a CAS, discuss with student any feasible options for any pre-sessional support. This gives students a chance to arrive ahead of term, settle in, and boost skills and confidence ahead of the term starting.

As soon as the CAS is issued, there are a few steps that are helpful and allow students to prepare for their arrival:

- Consider cultural needs when assigning housing, i.e. single sex flats, and inform students if they are not available.
- Housing may also need to be alerted to hold rooms beyond typical deadlines. Delays in the 2025 evacuation process meant some students did not arrive until December for their September start.

If government support is offered, and if the mechanism is the same as it was in 2025, it would be at this stage that the university would inform the Gaza Departures Team of their student's eligibility for support (more details in the next section).

If a government decision has not been made to support evacuations by the time Gaza applicants have received offers, both the university (ideally a VC or admissions official) and the student should inform the local MP that they have an offer, a scholarship, a CAS, and a visa application (GWF) number, and hope to take up their place in the Autumn.

In 2025, local MPs were critical in amplifying the requests from both students and universities. They needed the CAS, GWF, and scholarship information in order to make enquiries on behalf of the student. It was largely these MPs who were in touch with students and universities directly who raised the issue in Parliament and kept it on the political agenda.

Departure from Gaza (2025)

If the UK government extends its support for the exit of Gaza students for the 2026 / 27 academic year, shifting geopolitics in the region may mean that the mechanism of safe passage will be different. For example, a shift in the third country where biometrics are registered, from Jordan to Egypt. However, as borders are likely to remain sealed, and no Visa Application Center is anticipated to open in Gaza, UK government intervention *will* be necessary if students are to arrive safely.

While specifics may change, the overall mechanism of support seems likely to mirror, in some key aspects, the 2025 protocols. Below, then, is a detailed description of how that process took place, which we hope will go some way in preparing HEIs for another year of welcoming Gaza students onto their campuses.

Exit Protocols:

When the UK government announced in August 2025 its intention to support the exit of eligible scholars from Gaza, a three-department implementation team was created: The Department for Education (DfE), Home Office (HO), and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

Universities UK International (UUKi) identified key contacts at universities with Gaza offerholders who were asked to email a DfE contact confirming the student name, offer, and validity of their scholarship. The DfE then verified places and scholarships and sent this information to the HO to carry out its own checks.

If the HO gave preliminary approval, the student's name was passed to the Gaza Departures Team - the main point of contact for universities at the FCDO. The Departures Team would then establish direct contact with the student via email and Whatsapp to confirm that they were eligible for departure assistance and ask for copies of their documents to share with COGAT (the Israeli military's civilian and administrative coordinating body for Gaza and the West Bank), and the Jordanian Ministry of Interior for security clearance. Once clearance from both bodies was obtained, students would be notified and told of an approximate date for departure.

Three working days (or so) before leaving, students would be notified of a meeting place, and begin the trip to Jordan that would take between 10-20 hours.

The following day, students were taken to the British consulate to register their biometrics. Very basic medical checks were offered, and students were able to fill any essential prescriptions. They were given 150 Dinars in cash and to buy clothing during their five days in Jordan. They also received some support in the form of gift cards with 100 Dinars balance from the Jordan Red Crescent On the fifth day in Amman, students boarded flights to the UK (either to London or Manchester, then on by air or rail to their university towns and cities). Officials from the students' respective universities met them at the

airport, and accompanied them to their accommodation. In many cases, regional UK cooperation meant that one official met students from multiple universities and traveled with them to their next nearest location.

Universities and in some cases students were invoiced for the evacuation expenses.

We know that a much more straightforward route for departure would be south through the Rafah crossing with Egypt. While the Rafah crossing has re-opened, it has done so intermittently and on a case-by-case basis for medical evacuees and in some cases foreign nationals. If it remains open, it is anticipated that other civilian categories, like students, will be permitted to exit, but the timeframe is unknown. It is also unclear how the issue of biometrics would be solved, as there remains no Visa Application Center open in Gaza. For this reason, requests are being made to the UK Government to ensure that the Jordan route remains a possibility for students with offers and scholarships at UK universities.

Pre-Arrival Preparation

Once a student's place is confirmed, relevant university staff will need to prepare for their arrival. The first role will be to identify which teams / departments will lead on each of the tasks. Please note that the list below is based on the experience of the 2025 cohort, which in all cases arrived late (some just after Welcome Week, others weeks or months into term). The hope is that any supported students in 2026 would arrive on time.

Coordinated Arrivals Assistance – Essential Actions

- Advise relevant departments so that adequate mentorship is in place.
- Pre-clear students for Disability / Wellbeing Services, and brief them on what is available to them through this office.
- Pre-arrange registration with university GPs.
    - With consent, offer context to doctors in advance.
- Wellbeing departments can assign an experienced advisor who can meet with the student post-arrival as a pre-booked session.
- Ensure staff support is put in place for those working with Gaza students.
- Coordinate with financial aid or student funding offices to release the first instalment of stipend as soon as the student arrives. For some, this took the form of an advance on student stipends that was loaded onto a pre-paid card from the Post Office. Others used Western Union. Where this was not possible, universities offered grocery store vouchers and pre-loaded meal cards for on campus eating.
- In line with Sanctuary recommendations, and given that students in 2025 arrived with nothing, arrange with accommodation the delivery of an essential items kit (bedding, kitchenware, toiletries, small basic foodstuffs). In many cases, Student Unions were excellent resources for welcoming students and offering peer-to-peer support, so it is often useful to reach out at this point (see On-Campus Support).
    - Laptop / headphones / prepaid SIM card is also helpful.

Late Arrivals

- Liaise with student services to prioritise an enrolment slot as early as possible with a named contact.
- Work with philanthropy to secure additional funding as soon as the student arrives if there are worries about insufficient support.
- Leave a printed checklist of things the student needs to do in the first few days.

On-Campus Support

Students in the 2025 cohort reported being both overwhelmed and isolated. The most successful approaches were staged, starting with brief essentials and adding information as it could be received and would be relevant. An initial prioritisation of daily living needs was best followed on by an expansion of support networks, including offering psychological support.

Your Student Union may be able to:

- Allocate a buddy to the newly-arrived student who can offer practical support such as: navigating public transport, purchasing and topping up a travel card, registering for a GP (if not pre-arranged), setting up a bank account, such as Monzo or Revolut, accessing emergency services, and integrating with the community.
- Provide life in the UK orientation if not made available during Welcome Week.
- Offer tours of the local area.

Relevant university staff can:

- Remind students of other avenues of support, such as hardship funds.
- Connect students with university housing and financial advice service.
- Advise students of any available academic or language support.
- Check in with the student a few times during the first weeks.
- Advise students of support available by Careers Services.
- In exceptional cases arrange assessment extensions.

Post-Graduation Support

It is unclear when students will be able to return to Gaza. For now, borders remain closed and access to Gaza (or the West Bank, or elsewhere for Gaza residents) is extremely limited, if not impossible to secure. Most students will need to remain in the UK. Below is a list of support that has been offered to students so they might continue their professional development in the UK until it is safe for them to return home. This support aims to soften the ‘cliff edge’ experienced by many students (in particular in short masters programs) where university and scholarship support end abruptly. As Gaza students have little to fall back on, there is much that universities and NGOs are offering to assist. This includes:

University Direct Support:

- Extend student residence departure dates where possible (if not possible, link students with organisations that can help find secure housing. See the Resources section below).

- Make students aware of various grant or bursary schemes (i.e. Work Experience Funding Schemes) or consider offering on-campus employment.
- Some scholarships designed directly for Gaza scholars have provided extended funding beyond the close of their program to assist with the transition, as well as direct payment of Graduate Route visa including IHS fees.

Useful referrals:

- Direct students to any resources around visas and immigration so they can make informed decisions. Duncan Lewis, Garden Court Chambers, Safe Passage, and Leigh Day are all firms that have taken on cases for Gaza students where major difficulties arose.

Transition to Employability Support:

- Support converting credentials (i.e. teaching, medical, engineering) so they are recognised in the UK.
- Advise students of any grants or funding available for post-grad studies and research positions.
- Providing mentors (professional and academics) through the university network and career / coach centre.
- Coordinate with NGOs, local communities, and career centres for the best practice of transition to employability (money generation opportunity, internships work replacement, etc. See Resources).

Dependents

In the case of the 2025 cohort, the government reversed course on its decision to prohibit eligible students from bringing dependents. The reversal (which brought support for students in line with existing UKVI visa regulations) was announced on 27 October 2025, allowing Tier 8 (research degrees, MRes, Mphil, PhD) students to apply to bring spouses and children.

As the situation of students and their particular scholarships' support for dependents are wholly different, this section will not be comprehensive. Rather, it will address some of the major questions and concerns expressed by universities and students in 2025, and share best practices for universities who may welcome scholar families in the 2026 / 27 academic year.

Financial support for dependents must be demonstrated.

Students must demonstrate sufficient means to be eligible to bring dependents (£845 per month per dependent for courses in London or £680 per month per dependent for courses outside London for the first nine months of study) and also pay for visa applications and the IHS (these rates are also likely to go up in 2026). Students with

dependents will face the same difficulties in paying for these expenses even where means exist, and many will need support from external organisations.

**Best Practices around welcoming families include*:

- If you are offering scholarships for research programmes, it is worth considering whether the funds could accommodate dependents (as the Council for at Risk Academics, or Commonwealth scholarships).
- Ask eligible students early on if they are planning to bring dependents and assist in securing family accommodation if it is not automatically offered by the university.
- Signpost scholars to free English courses for adult dependents if needed; consider if the university might assist a scholar spouse by allowing them to audit courses or access advice on converting credentials so they are able to work.

If you are expecting a scholar family, items on the checklist below are useful to help get them set up quickly:

- Request course timetable as soon as possible so that childcare arrangements can be made (esp if both parents are studying or if the other parent will train or work).
- Where scholars have an external scholarship, contact funders to discuss any extra support that might be on offer (esp for childcare).
- Direct students to the Ofsted database so they can identify childcare providers before arrival. It is useful to suggest childminders in the short term, as they are often more flexible and have shorter waiting lists.
- For school-aged children, contact your local authority to explain the situation so that schooling might be arranged directly. Explain catchment areas, Ofsted ratings, and SEN provisions to scholar parents where applicable.
- Note that initial essentials packs might helpfully contain some basics for the arriving children.

Beyond Best Practices

- Partner with local NHS trusts through which psychological wellbeing practitioners can freelance.
- Offer supervision for non-clinical university staff.
- Offer further financial support to make up for the cost of buying an entirely new wardrobe.

Best Practice Check List

Admissions

☐ Identify applicants requiring contextual support.
☐ Allow flexibility in recommendation letters (generic, outdated, or waived).
☐ Accept projected grades or provisional transcripts.
☐ Provide flexible options for proof of English (e.g. alternative tests, interviews).
☐ Ensure policies for applicants affected by conflict are documented and consistent.
☐ Consider adjusted entry routes for undergraduate applicants (e.g. integrated foundation year).

Scholarships & Funding

☐ Offer fully funded scholarships covering full programme duration.
☐ Cover visa fees and Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS).
☐ Provide travel and transit support.
☐ Include living cost bursaries (aligned with UK cost of living).
☐ Allocate arrival support funds (cash or vouchers).
☐ Cover postgraduate visa costs where applicable.
☐ Ensure funding is secured upfront (multi-year guarantees).

Acceptance & Financial Barriers

☐ Waive acceptance fees or defer until funding is secured.
☐ Ensure fee waiver process is clearly visible and easy to request.

Documentation & Pre-Departure

☐ Issue CAS as early as possible.
☐ Provide official letters to support passport applications.
☐ Maintain communication with students regarding departure processes.
☐ Liaise with government bodies where necessary.

Pre-Arrival Preparation

☐ Coordinate across departments (admissions, housing, wellbeing, finance).
☐ Arrange accommodation (consider cultural needs).
☐ Pre-register students with GP services.
☐ Assign wellbeing advisor.
☐ Prepare financial access (stipends, prepaid cards, vouchers).
☐ Arrange essential items (bedding, food, toiletries, laptop).
☐ Plan orientation sessions (academic and practical life in the UK).

Arrival & On-Campus Support

☐ Provide airport pickup and transition support.
☐ Assign student buddy / peer mentor.
☐ Facilitate registration (ID, bank account, GP, transport).
☐ Deliver welcome and orientation support.
☐ Offer staged wellbeing and psychological support.

☐ Conduct regular check-ins during initial weeks.
☐ Provide access to hardship funds and financial advice.
☐ Offer academic and English language support.

Postgraduate & Transition Support

☐ Support recognition of professional qualifications in the UK.
☐ Provide visa and immigration guidance.
☐ Cover or advise on Graduate Route visa options.
☐ Connect students with internships and career services.
☐ Assist with housing beyond study period.

Dependents

Pre-Arrival

☐ Determine whether scholarship funds can accommodate dependents.
☐ Ask eligible student if they plan on bringing dependents.
☐ Assist in securing family accommodation if not offered at university.
☐ Consier allowing adult dependent to audit courses.
☐ Where relevant, liaise with external scholarship provider to offer extra support if possible.
☐ Explain catchment areas, Ofsted ratings, and SEN provisions to scholar parents where applicable.
☐ For young children, direct student to Ofsted database to identify childcare providers as waitlists can be long.
☐ For school-aged children, contact local authority to see about arranging schooling directly.
☐Contact local organisations to prepare some basics for arriving children.

Post-Arrival

☐ Signpost English language classes for adult dependents.
☐ Link adult dependent to advice on converting credentials so they are able to work.
☐ Work with family to arrange childcare needs.
☐ Connect family to other scholar families at your university.
☐ Connect family to local authority.

Contacts & Resources

This report was compiled by the GSI UK team (Jacqueline Shoen, Nora Parr, Ahmad Alagha). Please contact the GSI if you would like to discuss any of the contents in this document or need further support. GSI can be reached at: uk@gsids.net.

ISNAD: Helps university students in Gaza to resume their education.
Friends of Palestinian Universities: Builds UK and international academic solidarity partnership and exchange with Palestinian higher education institutions facing systematic attack.
UKCISA: Provides free independent international student advice.
Universities UK International (UUKI): The collective voice of 142 universities in the UK.
LINES4Palestine: Provides academic support for English language teachers and English and Education graduates who no longer have access to education or professional development.
Oxford ELLT: English language testing accepted by over 250 universities worldwide.
Phoenix Space: Empowers underserved children and youth to become self-reliant, creative, and adaptable agents of change in their communities through transformative STEM education, digital upskilling, and lifelong learning opportunities.
80 Plus: A UK-based non-profit helping talented students from Gaza continue their education through fully funded one-year taught MA scholarships at UK universities.
Ofsted: Inspects education providers in the UK.
Room for Refugees: Matches refugees and asylum seekers with households across the UK.
Arabic Therapists UK: A directory of English & Arabic-speaking pro-bono psychotherapists, counsellors, and psychiatrists.
Therapy for Palestine UK: Another group providing pro-bono therapy for Palestinians in the UK.
Baby Basics: Supports families with practical essentials from birth to five years old.

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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.

12 Oct 2026

Gaza غزة Scholarship Initiative
SAFEGUARDING PALESTINIAN FUTURES

PHOENIX SPACE

UK COALITION FOR GAZA STUDENTS

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

This Best Practices Guide covers the following topics:

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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.

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[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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