

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

WANT TO WORK IN THE USA?

GET TIPS FROM YOUR
ALUMNI NETWORK!

Young professionals and graduate employers from the Birmingham alumni community share their experiences of living and working in the USA.

With more than 300,000 alumni, there are Birmingham graduates across the globe. The USA is one of the most popular destinations for our alumni, with more than 4,000 based there.

This guide will take you through the process of moving to the USA, with insights from alumni who have already made the move. It will cover what to plan before leaving, how to find and apply for jobs and how to integrate into society.

THE BASICS

In case you haven't started your research yet, let our alumni talk you through the basics of life in the USA.

MAIN NATIONALITIES

MULTINATIONAL

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

911 (AMBULANCE, POLICE AND FIRE)

MAIN TRANSPORT



CAR AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

‘Outside major cities or for travel between cities, transportation often requires driving as the railway network is far less extensive than in the UK. Bus services do connect different towns, but don't run as frequently as desired.’

Paul Humphrey (PhD Modern Languages, 2013)

‘International driver's licenses are only valid for use for one year (depending on the state), after which you will be required to take state practical and theory tests.’

Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

POPULATION

319 MILLION



MAIN LANGUAGE

ENGLISH

‘Many Americans have trouble understanding non-American accents. Imitation often helps.’

Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

CURRENCY

US DOLLAR (\$)

INTERNET DOMAIN

WWW....

.US OR .COM

MAJOR RELIGIONS



PROTESTANT AND ROMAN CATHOLIC

‘America is much more conservative, politically, ideologically, and religiously. The American ‘right’ is much further ‘right’ than in the UK.’

Paul Rezkalla (MA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, 2013)



THE LABOUR MARKET

What can you expect from working in the USA?

LABOUR FORCE 
159 MILLION (2013)

 **TAX RATE**
RANGES FROM 10%–39.6%
(DEPENDING ON SALARY AND STATE)

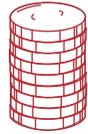
‘Prices in shops and restaurants are given minus tax so everything you buy is slightly more expensive than you anticipate.’
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

COST OF LIVING
CAN BE HIGHER THAN UK
(DEPENDING ON STATE)

‘It would be best to secure work before moving here, as living costs can be expensive. NYC is just as, if not more, expensive than London.’
Paul Rezkalla (MA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, 2013)

‘Tipping is customary everywhere, from restaurants and bars to car parks. People usually tip between 15-25% of the total and not leaving a tip is often considered rude, even if the service was not exceptional.’
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

AVERAGE STARTING SALARY
\$2,700 PER MONTH AT LEAST



AVERAGE WORKING WEEK
40 HOURS, MONDAY TO FRIDAY
WITH OCCASIONAL HALF DAYS ON SATURDAYS
(BUT MANY WILL WORK 50+ HOURS)

‘Working hours can vary. Some organisations start the working day at 8am. There are few breaks during the day and lunch periods are often short.’
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

 **UNEMPLOYMENT RATE**
6%

AVERAGE AGE AT GRADUATION

 **HOLIDAY ENTITLEMENT**
10 DAYS PUBLIC HOLIDAY
(ANNUAL LEAVE DEPENDS ON JOB AND LENGTH OF SERVICE)

‘In the UK vacation days are given much more generously than in the US. For new hires I would say the average American receives half the number that they would in the UK.’
Bethel Hailemichael (MSc International Business, 2013)

‘I would negotiate to get more holiday before you accept a job offer.’
Graham Hulbert (BSc Mechanical Engineering, 2010)

For more information about each of these areas, Google ‘TargetJobs Working Abroad’ or ‘University of Birmingham Graduate Careers’.

Please note that these figures are averages or estimates that were deemed accurate at the time of print.

WHAT TO PLAN

Don't forget anything! Let our recent graduates talk you through what they planned before they left, as well as what you can leave until you arrive.

- ✓ ASSESS THE BEST WAY FOR YOU TO GET A VISA
- ✓ BOOK FLIGHTS
- ✓ APPLY FOR A SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (SSN)
- ✓ SET UP A BANK ACCOUNT
- ✓ FIND ACCOMMODATION
- ✓ DECIDE ON A PHONE OPTION

‘To start a current account (checking account in the US) you need your passport, proof of address (or proof of employment) and a nominal contribution (\$100-200).’

Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

‘The easiest routes are Student visas and Inter-company transfers or H1Bs for those with postgraduate degrees. Everyone should also consider the Green Card lottery.’

Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)

‘Any of the major cities along the east coast would be good for recent graduates, the south tends to be more affordable than the northeast.’

Mark Bielski (Modern History, 2014)

‘In order to buy a phone you will need an SSN, or buy a pay as you go.’

Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)

‘Try to stay loyal to one airline and set up an account for their rewards scheme to collect air miles.’

Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

‘I found my accommodation by searching local estate agents online and booking appointments for when I arrived. Stay with a friend or in a hotel for the first few days while you look.’

Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

‘Get a credit card ASAP in your new country; it is important to start building a credit score.’

Graham Hulbert (BSc Mechanical Engineering, 2010)

‘There are a vast number of housing opportunities posted on [Craigslist.com](#).’

Graham Hulbert (BSc Mechanical Engineering, 2010)

‘Ask your employer to have any required paperwork ready and take them to your nearest Social Security Authority office upon arrival. You will have to pay a double deposit on accommodation without an SSN and you will also not be able to receive your salary.’

Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

‘Companies in the UK that are present in the US do not work together so it is not possible to transfer an existing contract. Contracts are only available for a minimum of two years.’

Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

For more detailed information on the legalities of moving abroad, consult the [Careers Network's International Work Experience page](#) or the [British Embassy Washington website](#).

FINDING JOBS

Our alumni have pursued a wide range of careers, but there are some key places that they all advise you look when searching for a job in the USA.



WEBSITES

www.linkedin.com
www.monster.com
www.dice.com
www.indeed.com
www.craigslist.com

‘*Indeed.com* is great for all work, and *Highered.com* is the best for teaching jobs. There was no newspaper that I managed to find.’

Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)

‘Pick 10-12 organisations and target them. Arrange to meet key players away from their office, it is effective to get to know people at social functions and make connections.’

Mark Bielski (Modern History, 2014)

‘Most fields have their own specific online search engines but when all else fails use *Craigslist* and *Indeed*.’

Paul Rezkalla (MA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, 2013)

‘*Glassdoor.com* is a great website to look at company reviews.’

Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)



NETWORKING

‘I use local recruitment agency listings to find available jobs. Looking at company listings by area and doing general google searches is also helpful, as well as using *LinkedIn*.’

Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)

‘I used science specific job websites such as *nature.com* and *sciencecareers.org* to find my position. However, there are a wide range of websites and recruiters advertising jobs in the US.’

Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)



RECRUITMENT AGENCIES

For more information on where to look, use the [TargetJobs Working Abroad pages](#).

APPLYING FOR JOBS

Our alumni talk through some of their experiences of applying for jobs in the USA.



DESIRABLE SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

WHAT ARE THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESSES IN THE USA COMPARED TO THE UK?

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION ?



“Many companies will expect College transcripts (listing studies, grade averages etc).”

Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)

“Cover letters are a must and it is worth taking time over these. You should also never ask about the pay as this is a negotiation after the job offer.”

Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)

“In the US they expect a ‘resume’, which should be one or two pages. You will most likely have a phone interview with the HR representative, then one with the hiring manager, and a final one with multiple staff.”

Graham Hulbert (BSc Mechanical Engineering, 2010)

Make the most of the Careers Network (CN). They can discuss your career options, give guidance on your CV, conduct mock interviews and much more. Google ‘University of Birmingham Graduate Careers’ for more info.

Remember that CN is also available to you for two years after you graduate.

“We look for resumes which have more than just strong academics. It is important to highlight experiences/ jobs/ aspirations which will differentiate you from others.”

Bethel Hailemichael (MSc International Business, 2013)

“Those most called for are good communication and problem solving skills. Curiosity is also key, so be prepared to ask questions.”

Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)

“Attributes we find attractive are punctuality, attentiveness and focus during interview, use of initiative, accuracy and attention to detail, and a good disposition.”

Mark Bielski (Modern History, 2014)

BUSINESS ETIQUETTE



“Business etiquette is polite and politically correct. No sexual, racial or personal comments are made. Wordage is largely positive, with discussions based on what can be done, not what can’t.”

Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)

“In general, people who work together tend to go home after work and rarely interact outside of a work capacity.”

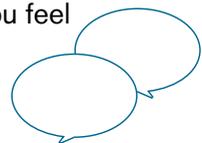
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

“When applying for jobs, I would advise spelling words the “American” English way and indenting the first line of each paragraph.”

Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)

HOW TO INTEGRATE

So you've made your plans, you've booked your flights and you've found your job...but what should you do when you actually arrive? Our alumni have loads of advice to give you to ensure that you feel a part of American society as quickly as possible.



USE THE RIGHT 'HUMOR'

‘A lot of the Americans I've met do not appreciate or understand dark humour (or “humor”).’

Paul Rezkalla (MA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, 2013)

‘They will probably wince at the British sense of humour. However, in my experience, they soon get over it.’
Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)



‘Social community websites are a good way to meet people. The couch-surfing community is great to use to travel the country. There are also websites you can use to meet expats, e.g. internations.org.’
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

USE SOCIAL COMMUNITY WEBSITES

‘There is a website called meetup.com. Thousands of people use this to make friends.’
Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)

FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THEIR RULES AND LAWS

‘Being drunk in public is an offence and swearing is much more seriously frowned upon. Many people also carry weapons with them on a daily basis.’
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

‘Laws are different in each state. Be warned!’
Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)

GET TO KNOW YOUR CO-WORKERS

‘Workplaces usually plan outings and social events for employees to get to know one another.’
Paul Rezkalla (MA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, 2013)

‘First getting to know co-workers would be the easiest way to integrate. If working for a large company, there will be many social opportunities involving new hires.’
Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)

GET INVOLVED WITH LOCAL ACTIVITIES

‘Here in Washington DC (similar to Birmingham) the city throws many community events, like concerts, festivals and farmers markets.’
Bethel Hailemichael (MSc International Business, 2013)

‘I joined a local hockey team. There are many leagues in most areas that involve social activities as well as competition; softball, kickball, bowling to name a few.’
(Graham Hulbert (BSc Mechanical Engineering, 2010)



Enjoy yourself!

BE AWARE OF THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

‘Americans are less direct than British people and far more passive aggressive. It is also extremely politically correct here and very difficult to keep up with the “buzz phrases”.’
Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)

YOUR ALUMNI

A wide variety of alumni contributed to this guide. Here are just a few examples of what they're up to at the moment.

Degree:

BSc Chemical Engineering

Year of graduation:
1984

Role: Principal Marketing Specialist, Symantec

Responsibilities: Direct marketing activities including data analysis, email campaign management and business development



HELEN BATES

Degree: MA Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Year of graduation: 2013

Role: Teacher, Virginia International University

Responsibilities: Teaching TESOL and English to international students

Reason for moving: I moved to the USA to be with my husband who is an American citizen



ANNELI HIBBERT

Degree: MSc & PhD Toxicology

Year of graduation:
2008 and 2013

Role:
Teacher, Virginia International University

Responsibilities: Conducting research into nanoparticle-based delivery systems to enhance the efficacy of therapeutics

Reason for moving: I was offered a research position which was a fantastic opportunity to work within a well-networked group and carry out interesting and important work



CHIBUZOR UCHEA

Degree: Mechanical Engineering

Year of graduation: 2010

Role: Continuous Improvement Manager, Eaton

Responsibilities: Find ways to manufacture our products more efficiently, with better quality or in less time

Reason for moving: I am a dual national (US and UK) and spent the first few years of my childhood in the US, so I wanted to go back to experience the country I am a citizen of



GRAHAM HULBERT

Want to stay in touch with other Birmingham graduates once you're in the USA?

University of Birmingham Alumni

University of Birmingham Alumni and friends

@birminghamalum

Our USA alumni society also meets regularly and will give you the opportunity to meet and network with fellow alumni in the area. Google 'UoB USA Alumni' to find out more.

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