

Early visa information for offer holders

Dear Student

Note: This circular is for **non-EEA/Swiss students** who may need a Tier 4 student visa to study in the UK. If you are unsure whether or not you require a Tier 4 student visa, please check the [University website](#).

We are writing to let you know that Oxford will be providing detailed information and support for candidates with confirmed offers for your visa application over the summer. When you receive these emails you should read them carefully and you can contact us, or the Student Immigration team with any questions. Most students will be applying for their visas from July onwards, but we would like to prepare you by sending some information now.

We know that you will be thinking about the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic (see section 2 below) and want to assure you that the University will support you by answering any visa related questions you may have.

Some useful information to start preparing for your visa application:

1. [When can you start your visa application](#)
2. [What is the impact of the pandemic on visa applications and travelling to the UK](#)
3. [Visa time limit for studying in the UK](#)
4. [English language tests and your visa application](#)
5. [Students already studying in the UK](#)
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1. When can you start your visa application

You will need a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) number and statement from Oxford for your visa application. We will email unconditional offer holders later in the summer, when we start preparing your CAS, and you will receive your CAS number when you have met all the academic and financial conditions of your offer.

If you are an **undergraduate or visiting student the college** will prepare your CAS number for you, if you are a **graduate or recognised student the academic department/faculty** will prepare your CAS number.

You cannot apply for your visa **earlier than 3 months before your course start date** given on your CAS and for this reason most departments/colleges will start drafting and preparing your CAS in either June or July, or sometimes later if you still need to meet other offer academic or financial conditions.

When you have your CAS number, we advise you to apply for the visa as soon as you can from July onwards and most application centres take about 15 working days to process the application. You can also pay extra for a quicker service. Early September would therefore be the latest date you should be applying under the standard service to get your visa in time to arrive for early October. Some courses start earlier than October, so please do consider this too.

Your visa will be issued in the form of a vignette/sticker in your passport which will be valid for one month to travel to the UK and then on arrival you will collect your BRP (biometric residence permit) in the form of a card which will be valid for the duration of your course and some additional time. We will advise you on the location of where you can collect this card. Note that you cannot ask to for your visa (vignette/sticker) to start more than one month before the start date of your course.

2. What is the impact of the pandemic on visa applications and travelling to the UK

We know that you will be thinking about the impact of the pandemic on the opening dates of visa application centres and your ability to travel to and study in the UK. The University website has [information for applicants and offer holders](#) which will be updated with any changes, and we will keep you informed throughout the summer.

Some visa centres overseas and in the UK reopened on 1 June and it is expected more centres will open again over the summer but the opening dates might vary by country.

English language test centres were closed but have started to re-open in some cities. To support you in meeting English language requirements, we have made changes to the evidence we will accept (see [information for applicants and offer holders](#)). The evidence you have provided to meet English language and qualifications conditions for admission purposes can also be used to meet the requirements for your visa when we issue your CAS number, provided it has been accepted as sufficient. See also section 4 below.

The University of Oxford is working with the UK Home Office and other groups and agencies on proposals to make the visa application process easier this summer and to ensure that applications can be processed promptly as the visa application centres reopen.

3. Visa time limit for studying in the UK

There is a time limit of **5 years** for studying at degree level in the UK on a Tier 4 visa. If you have completed a 4 or 5-year undergraduate degree and are now progressing to a master's course, the limit is **6 years** instead.

The 5-year time limit does not apply if you are starting an MSc (Res) or DPhil degree for the first time. It does include time spent on an old style student visa issued before March 2009, as well as time spent on Tier 4 including time spent resitting exams or retaking modules.

If you have already completed a DPhil/PhD or Master's Research degree longer than 13 months in the UK on a student visa and you are applying for a further visa, the period of leave (visa) you are seeking must not lead to you spending more than 8 years in the UK as a Tier 4 student.

If you have previously studied in the UK, at any time, and your new course at Oxford is going to exceed any of the time limits described above your visa application could be refused. For examples of how the time limit works, see the [UKCISA website](#).

If you are concerned about how these limits may affect you getting a visa, please contact [Student Immigration](#) for advice.

4. English language tests and your visa application

We know that it may be difficult to book an English language test currently and we have made some changes to the evidence we will accept this year (as explained in section 2) to make it easier for you, as explained on the coronavirus [information for applicants and offer holders](#) website.

If you apply for your visa with a passport from a country that is classified as an [English speaking majority country by the Home Office](#) (page 75) you will not need to provide any evidence of English language ability for your visa application. Please note that, if you are not a native English speaker, you may still need to provide evidence to the University to meet your academic conditions.

If you are applying with a passport not on the above list, then the University will vouch for your English language ability on your CAS provided you have achieved the required results in one of the [English language tests accepted by the University](#), or you have been granted a waiver by your department/college based on your previous education. You **do not have to** provide additional evidence of your English language ability or submit any test results with your visa application.

5. Students already studying in the UK

Please note if you are currently studying in the UK, at a different institution, on a Tier 4 visa and starting a course at Oxford in October, before you enrol you must either:

- 1) have been granted a new visa for Oxford, **OR**
- 2) show evidence you have applied for a visa for Oxford and are waiting for a decision.

You will not be allowed to enrol at Oxford without a visa for Oxford, or proof you have applied for it.

Current Oxford students are allowed to begin your studies on your current Oxford visa if you have time remaining, but you must make a new application **within six weeks of the start of term** i.e. before 20 November 2020 even if your old visa has a lot of time remaining on it. However, we would recommend applying before October as the Government is intending to increase the Immigration Health Surcharge on 1 October 2020.

6. Financial requirements for your visa application

The financial evidence you may need to show for your visa application is different from your College Financial Declaration and you may need to show different documentation. It is a separate process and completion of your College Financial Declaration does not mean you automatically meet the Tier 4 student visa requirements.

Students from [‘low risk’ countries](#) **do not need** to submit financial evidence with their visa application unless asked by the Home Office but you should be prepared to show it if requested during a spot check. This tends to be quite unusual but you might possibly be asked after they have started processing your visa application.

The following information is to help you prepare for the evidence requirement.

Failure to provide the correct financial documents is the most common reason for a visa refusal. If this happens, you will need to apply and pay for your visa again, and risk being late for the start of your course, or be unable to commence your course if severely delayed. You should read the [Tier 4 Policy guidance](#) very carefully and contact Student Immigration if you have any concerns.

The level of living expenses (maintenance) for which the Home Office requires evidence is currently £1,015 a month up to a maximum of nine months. The amount will therefore be £9,135 for most courses. You will need to hold evidence of this to support your visa application.

If you have a full scholarship or bursary that covers both your living costs and fees you may not need bank statements, but you will need to show or have available your original scholarship/bursary letter. If you have a partial scholarship you may still need to show personal funding in addition to the money received from your financial sponsor. You must also check carefully whether your financial sponsor meets the Home Office definition (page 36 in the Tier 4 policy guidance, see link above).

If you are self-funded or funded by your parents, you must have at least this level of funding for living expenses plus an amount to cover your first year’s fees. This needs to have been in your or their bank account for a period of at least 28 consecutive days and before your visa application. The balance cannot fall below this amount at any period within those 28 days.

If you pay any accommodation fees (to college or university), you can deduct this from the £9,135 amount for living expenses but only up to a maximum of £1,265, and this will be shown on your CAS.

7. Your family members

Your family members can only apply as your dependants if you are on a graduate course for 9 months or longer, or if you are on a course (undergraduate or postgraduate) longer than six months funded by the UK government or your home government. Please [click here](#) for further information.

If your family plan to come to the UK as visitors, you should note that entry to the UK as a visitor is valid for a maximum of six months. They will not be allowed to live in the UK by using the route repeatedly. Visitors are not eligible for NHS treatment or publicly funded schooling and are not allowed to work.

8. Tuberculosis screening

Some countries may require students to have a TB scan before they apply for a visa. You can find out whether this is required for the country where you apply for your visa from the [Home Office list of countries \(Appendix T\)](#). You can start arranging this before your CAS is issued and whilst your offer is conditional to save some time in the summer.

9. New Graduate Immigration route

The UK government proposes to introduce this new scheme for degree students completing in Summer 2021 or later (an exact date has yet to be finalised). It is an opportunity for when you have completed your studies to apply for a two-year visa to stay in the UK to work. Please see the government [website](#) for more information on this new scheme.

10. ATAS (Academic Technology Approval scheme)

only applies to [some graduate courses in Medical Sciences, Maths, Physical and Life Sciences](#) and [undergraduate courses in Physics and Materials](#)

Some courses (see links above) require that you apply for an ATAS certificate to include with your visa application. Your department (graduate students) or college (undergraduate students) will tell you if this applies to your course.

The ATAS scheme was closed in April and May but it reopened to new applications on 1 June 2020.

For graduate students, you will need a *research statement* sent to you by the department which has been specifically agreed with your supervisor and describes your research project.

For undergraduate students in Physics and Materials courses, it will be a template letter with a list of course modules and the course details sent to you by your college.

It will take **30 working days** from when you apply online to get the certificate. You can apply for ATAS whilst your offer is conditional and before your CAS is issued.

You should allow enough time to get this certificate, so your visa application is not delayed at a later stage as your visa cannot be granted without a certificate. Ideally, you would submit it with your visa application as it may be difficult to add it to your application whilst it is being processed. There is no charge for an ATAS application and it is valid to use with a visa application for 6 months.

Further information and help

For more detailed information about the visa requirements, or to seek advice from the University Visa Advisers see the [University website](#)

Do let us know if you have any further questions.

Kind regards

Student Immigration, University of Oxford
student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk