

Essential information before you apply for your visa

*for students not from the EU/EEA or Switzerland**

For offer holders starting at Oxford University in Autumn 2020

**note that EU/EEA/Swiss students starting from January 2021 onwards who do not have settled or pre-settled status will need to apply for a Tier 4 visa*

This is a short guide to help you apply for your visa. See also our [student visa webpages](#) with a **comprehensive guide** about completing the online visa application form. Read these notes carefully and keep them for future reference.

We know that you will be thinking about the impact of the **Coronavirus pandemic (see section 1.1 below)** and we want to reassure you that the University will support you through the visa application process, and will answer any questions you may have.

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Contacting us:

Email: student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk

Website: www.ox.ac.uk/students/visa/before

1 When to apply for your visa

The [University website](#) explains the steps you need to follow to obtain a visa before coming to the UK and has a comprehensive [guide to completing the online visa application](#) form.

You can also check:

- i. [UK Visas and Immigration](#) information on applying for your student visa in your home country
- ii. [UK Council for International Student Affairs](#) (UKCISA) also has a useful guide and updates about current concessions because of the pandemic

By the time you read this circular, you will probably be close to or within three months of the start date of your course, so once you have fulfilled **all the conditions** (academic and financial) associated with your offer, and you have received your Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) from your college or department you can apply for your visa. You cannot apply more than **three months** before the start date on your CAS.

Prepare thoroughly and apply as soon as you can to ensure that your visa is granted in time to travel to the UK for the start of your course.

1.1 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 offer holders](#) which will be updated with any changes, and we will keep you informed throughout the summer of any major changes. Visa application centres began opening again in a staged process with the first overseas centres and UK centres opening on 1 June, then further centres on 22 June, followed by another tranche on 28/29 June and then another 150 centres will open again in July.

English language test centres were closed in April and May but started to re-open in many cities in June and further centres will open in July. To support you in meeting English language requirements, we have made changes to the evidence we will accept (see [information for 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 2.3 below.

There are some [concessions for students, visitors currently in the UK](#) to switch visa status e.g. from a visitor visa to a Tier 4 student visa, if you were unable to leave the UK during the pandemic but these **do not apply** if you are currently outside the UK. You cannot come to the UK and switch visa status, so you **must obtain** your Tier 4 visa **before** coming to the UK.

The Home Office have allocated extra resources to help with the surge of applications expected over the summer to ensure applications can be processed promptly.

If, due to the pandemic, you are unable to secure a visa in time or cannot travel because of flight restrictions, your department/college and Student Immigration will look at solutions to help you start your studies which may include an initial online/remote period of study if deemed necessary.

1.2 Students currently in the UK on a Tier 4 visa

If you have been studying elsewhere in the UK, you **must apply for a new Tier 4 visa**; you will **not be allowed to enrol** unless you have obtained your new visa for Oxford or show us evidence of a submitted visa application. If you will be applying in the UK see the [University webpages](#).

There are [some Home Office concessions](#) to allow you to switch visa status in the UK if you could not leave during the pandemic, when this would not normally be possible. (Note that this **does not** apply if you are currently overseas as you must obtain your Tier 4 visa before coming to the UK).

a. Completing your current course

Your admission offer may or may not be conditional on you completing your current course in the UK. However, if you want to apply for your visa in the UK (regardless of your offer conditions) the Home Office requires you to have completed your current course or submit a *'highly likely to complete'* letter from your current visa sponsor. You **must** also speak to your Oxford department about using the highly likely to complete letter so it can be noted on your CAS.

1.3 Current Oxford students starting a further (second) course at Oxford

You should apply for a new visa before your next course begins, or at the latest within six weeks of starting the new course i.e. **before 20 November 2020** (or before this date, if your visa expires earlier or your course starts earlier). You should also think about **applying before 1 October 2020** as the Immigration Health Surcharge will increase from £300 a year to £470 a year (times the number of years of your course) for applications made on or after this date, so you could save money by applying earlier. Please also note the above paragraph about completing a previous course and [contact us](#) if you have any concerns.

1.4 How your student visa will be issued

If you are applying outside the UK, you will be issued a **30-day travel vignette (sticker) affixed** in your passport and an explanatory letter which will allow you to travel to the UK. The vignette/sticker start date will be whichever is the later of:

- i) one month before your course start date as given on your CAS, or...
- ii) 7 days before your *'intended date of travel'* to the UK as stated by you in your visa application (there is no commitment to actually travel on this date - see example below)

Example: if your CAS start date is 4 October 2020 and you choose an *'intended date of travel'* of 1 October 2020 your 30 day travel visa will start 7 days before i.e. 25 September and run until 25 October. You cannot ask for the travel visa to start earlier than 4 September in this example.

On arrival in the UK you will need to collect your Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) in the form of a credit card sized card which will be valid for the entire length of your course. Collect your BRP as soon as you can either from the Post Office or by special arrangement at your Oxford college (during the enrolment process) from 28 September to 6 October (see below for details and the code you will need to do this).

You need your BRP to enrol at Oxford and to open a bank account, so collect it as soon as you can.

If you are a current student in the UK and apply for a new visa within the UK, your BRP will be sent by courier to your home address or the correspondence address you stated on your application form.

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1.5 Where to collect your BRP (code required 2HE627)

Your BRP will be at the collection point you chose in your online visa application. For a limited period you may choose to collect it from your Oxford college from **28 September to 6 October** (during the enrolment process). We strongly recommend this option if you are arriving around those dates as you can collect it at the same time you collect your University card. However, see note below if you are starting earlier.

Please see our [guide to completing the online visa application](#) form for how to choose a collection option depending on your intended arrival date. If you decide to collect the BRP at your college you will need to:

- Use the code **2HE627** on the online visa application form for the 'alternative location collection' and;
- You **must sign up** [on our eventbrite page](#) to let us know you intend to collect your BRP at the college

Your college will advise you shortly before term starts about the enrolment dates and process (when you can collect your BRP and University card) and you **must read their guidance carefully** to ensure that social distancing procedures are followed and so they can ensure there are no queues.

For **MBA, MFE, MPP students** or other students arriving in Oxford **earlier than 28 September** you **should choose the Post Office**; and **not** your college as you will need your BRP earlier to open a bank account.

1.6 If your travel plans change

If your travel plans change and you need to arrive after your 30-day travel visa expires you will need to obtain a new one which costs £154. There are some exemptions from this charge during the pandemic if the situation is beyond your control.

2. Financial and qualification documents for your visa application and avoiding a visa refusal

The most common reason for refusal of a visa is submitting the incorrect financial evidence. If your visa is refused you will need to apply again, pay the fee and you may be late for the start of your course. About 90% of new Oxford students will not need to submit supporting documents with their visa application see section a. below.

The Home Office requirements are specific and **different from those for your College Financial Declaration**. The Home Office requires original documents accompanied by an official translation if not in English. Full detail of the requirements is given in the [Tier 4 Policy Guidance](#) document.

Please read our [guide to completing the online application](#) form carefully with reference to the amount of money you will need to show the Home Office and who can be your financial sponsor.

a. Students who do not need to submit financial evidence or qualification/s with their visa application:

If you are a '[low risk national](#)' in your home country or in the UK; or if you are eligible for the Tier 4 visa pilot scheme for Masters students (Masters courses less than 13 months duration see section 2.4) you do not need to include financial evidence or qualification/s with your application but must have it available in the required format in case the Home Office ask for it (there might be spot checks).

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2.1 ATAS (Academic Technology Approval Scheme)- apply early

Some graduate students studying Science, Engineering, Medical, and Technology degrees may need to get an ATAS certificate. If this applies to you it would have been stated in your admission offer letter and your college (for undergraduate students- MPhys, MPhysPhil, MMathPhys and MEng Materials only) or department (for graduate students in relevant subjects) will supply you with the details to make an application, and your CAS will indicate your subject requires ATAS. A list of graduate courses that need ATAS is on the [admissions webpages](#).

You **must use** the research statement agreed with your department that they will send you for ATAS purposes, or the list of subject topics for undergraduate students sent by your college for ATAS.

2.2 Tuberculosis screening requirement

You may need to be screened at an approved clinic for TB before applying for a visa, if you have been living in a listed country for more than six months immediately before your visa application. See [Appendix T](#) for list of countries. The certificate is valid for a visa application made within six months. It is advisable to get screened early; you do not have to wait for your CAS or unconditional offer to do this.

2.3 English language ability

Your CAS will either state '*Migrant from majority English speaking country*' and you do not need to submit anything further for your visa application; or if you were taught in English, have a language test waiver, or have met the English language conditions of your offer your CAS will state '*HEI has made assessment*' and you can select this option in your application and you **do not** need to submit any English language test results.

2.4 Tier 4 visa pilot scheme for Masters students- reduced evidence requirements

Oxford is taking part in the Tier 4 visa pilot scheme for Masters courses of 13 months duration or less. Eligible students do not need to submit evidence of previous qualifications or financial evidence with a visa application, although you should still hold the evidence and meet the requirements in case you are asked to show this at a later date (there may be spot checks).

Your visa will be issued with an extra 6 months after the course end date and you may use this post study period to look for work after finishing your studies, or to stay for a later graduation ceremony. You will be included in the scheme automatically; it is not possible to opt out. For further FAQs see the [student visa webpage](#).

3. Immigration Health Surcharge

You will need to pay this charge when you apply for your visa, see the [University webpages](#) (item 6) for further information. This charge is paid per year upfront (£300 per year x length of visa) for the total duration of your visa (including added post study time) and means you will be covered by the National Health Service while you are in the UK. Note that the surcharge will increase from £300 to £470 for visa applications made on or after 1 October 2020.

3.1 Previous Study in the UK

There is a limit on the amount of time that you can spend in the UK studying. Your visa will be refused if your new course would exceed this limit. Before issuing your CAS we will have checked so far as we can on the information we have available that your visa application will not put you in breach of the time limit. If you have studied in the UK before, please check [UKCISA's information](#) and notify your college or department if there could be a potential problem.

3.2 Academic progression

If you have studied in the UK before then any further study needs to be at the same or higher level and you must have successfully completed your previous course if you are applying for a Tier 4 visa within the UK. See section 1.2 if you haven't yet completed your most recent course.

3.3 Family members

For information about bringing family members to the UK please see the University webpages about [visas for your family](#). If you have queries about this, please [contact us](#) for advice.

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4. Frequently asked questions about Tier 4 visa applications

The University website has a [comprehensive guide](#) to completing the online application form but these are some of the most frequent questions we get asked.

a. Before your CAS is issued

Q: When will I get my CAS?

A: When you have met all your academic and financial conditions your college (undergraduate/visiting student) or department (graduate student) will start preparing your CAS.

Q: I will not get my A Level results until mid-August is it too late to apply for a visa?

A: There will be still be plenty of time but you should apply as soon as you can, a standard application should not take more than 15 days from your biometrics appointment.

Q: I am concerned about the visa application centre in my home country not being open, what is the latest date I can apply?

A: Many visa application centres reopened in June and further centres will open in July. We recommend not applying less than a month before you are due to travel to the UK. We will keep you updated on any issues over the summer but the Home Office are allocating extra resources to ensure visas are processed promptly.

Q: I will not get my results from my current UK University until late September, will I have enough time to apply for a new visa in the UK for my Oxford course?

A: See section 1.2 for information about whether you might be able to apply earlier with a 'highly likely to complete' letter. If you are applying in the UK, you can enrol at Oxford with a new visa or evidence of a submitted visa application.

Q: How do I find out if I need ATAS?

A: This will be stated on your CAS and your department (graduate students) or college (4 year UG Physics or Materials courses only) will give you a template letter to apply for ATAS. You can also check on the [Undergraduate Admissions webpages](#) and the [Graduate Admissions webpages](#).

Q: My passport expires in May 2021, is it a problem for my visa application?

A: No, as long as your passport will be valid at the time of your Tier 4 visa application and when you travel to the UK it is not a problem and there is no minimum passport validity period. Your visa will still be issued for the duration of your course. Your visa is issued in the form of a BRP card so it does not need to be changed if you get a new passport after it is issued. You would need to extend your passport at a later date and before it expires i.e. in one of the term breaks (if you do return home) or via your Embassy in London.

Q: Does my dependant/s need to fill in a visa form?

A: Yes, they will need to fill in a separate application form- [see our website](#). It is best if they apply at the same time as you as they will benefit from any low risk national or Tier 4 pilot exemption from submitting documents if you are eligible for one of those routes.

Q: My scholarship is 3 years but my course is 4.5 years, will I only get a 3 year visa?

A: That is not a problem and the visa will be granted for the length stated on your CAS with some additional time added. Scholarship information is not stated on the CAS, so if you are not exempt from needing to submit documents you will need to include the scholarship letter with your visa application.

b. After your CAS is issued

Q: My passport number has changed and is different from my CAS email. What should I do?

A: Your passport number must match the one on the CAS, email Tier4compliance@admin.ox.ac.uk with the new number, start and expiry date and your student number and they will add a note on the Home Office database.

Q: Why does my CAS state nationality 'Hong Kong' and passport 'Hong Kong'?

A: The Home Office database requires that both these fields match exactly. For Hong Kong SAR or BNO passports this will be Hong Kong for both fields; for China PRC this will be China for both fields: for Taiwan it will be Taiwan for both fields.

Q: Does my name on the CAS have to match the passport exactly?

A: Yes, it will need to match exactly including any middle names. Note that for **Malaysian and Singapore passports** the naming order is slightly different and as long as the surname field is correct the order of other names (if all included) does not matter.

Q: My CAS says I completed a 'BA in International Relations' but it was 'International Affairs', does this matter?

A: Minor differences will not matter too much but if a secondary subject is missing it should be corrected.

Q: Does it matter if my ATAS start date or end date is different to my CAS start and end date?

A: If the start date varies by a few days or weeks it does not matter; if the end date varies by more than several months contact student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk for advice.

Q: Can I update the fees paid on my CAS?

A: If you are not exempt from needing to submit financial documents (see section 2) and are self-funded or funded by your parents/legal guardian the money will need to be in the account for a certain period and you can opt to pay fees in advance to show less funds. Contact the person who submitted your CAS and the fees must be updated before your visa is processed.

Q: I am low risk or a Pilot student but I have been asked to submit financial evidence and/or qualifications with my visa application. Do I have to submit the documents?

A: Sometimes there is an error on the online form for the Pilot scheme which asks for documents when not required, [see the Pilot FAQs](#) for what to do in this scenario. If you submit documents when not required, they will have to be considered which could delay your visa application. Some students may be asked to submit documents later in the process as part of Home Office spot checks but this is quite unusual.

Q: Why do I have to pay the Immigration Health surcharge for 5 years for a DPhil course?

A: The maximum submission time for a DPhil is 4 years and we include 6 months for the viva and corrections which can take a while at Oxford. The Home Office then add a further 4 months meaning you need to pay 5 years. It is expensive to pay it all upfront but most students take around 4 years or longer to finish a DPhil and a visa extension is currently £475 plus £300 health surcharge so in the long run it will save money.

Q: My visa application is overdue, can you help?

A: If it is substantially delayed beyond the normal processing times, we may be able to help if it means you risk being unable to arrive for the start of the course. Email us your GWF application number, student number, visa service you chose i.e. standard or priority and the date of application.

Any further questions: about applying for your visa: student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk
about your CAS number: Tier4compliance@admin.ox.ac.uk

Please note the two teams work together, you only need to contact one email address.

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