July 2021
Student visa information for offer holders- please keep for future reference

Dear Student

Note: This circular is for offer holders who need to apply for a Student visa. If you are unsure whether you require a Student visa, please check the University website. This information supplements the information you have been receiving each month in the ‘Preparing for Oxford’ newsletters.

If you are an EU, EEA, Swiss national who has been granted pre-settled or settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme you will not need a student visa. If you have not applied under this scheme or are not eligible to do so, you will need a student visa.

Current Oxford students starting a new (second) course should read the last part of section 9.

When it is time to apply for your visa (see section 2 below) read this information carefully, if you are not able to apply for your visa at the moment (as you have not met all your conditions) keep this email for future reference.

We know that you will be thinking about the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and we will support you with information and advice and keep you updated throughout the summer.

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1. The impact of the pandemic on visa applications and travel to the UK

We know that you will be thinking about the impact of the pandemic on getting to the UK and your studies. The University website has information for offer holders which is updated regularly and includes links to the latest UK Government information on travelling to the UK, quarantine, and testing requirements during the pandemic.

The UK Government will extend the concessions for remote learning because of COVID until 6 April 2022, so if travel arrangements disrupt your chance to come here in person for the start of Michaelmas term and your college/department agree you can start remotely this will not affect your visa status. Most visa centres worldwide are now open, unless there are local or temporary
Government restrictions in your home country which may mean opening hours may be limited or you may have to wait longer to get a visa appointment.

If you are an EU, EEA or Swiss national you will normally be able to apply online using an app to verify your identity and will not need to attend a physical visa appointment.

2. When can I start my visa application?

You must wait to receive a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) number and statement by email before you can apply for your visa. Your CAS will only be issued after 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 department/faculty will prepare your CAS number. Before your CAS is finalised you will receive a draft CAS email from the department/college so you can check and confirm all the details are all correct.

You should read our webpage with FAQs about your CAS about how to check your draft CAS and what to do if you notice any mistakes after it is issued.

You can apply for your visa once you have your CAS and are within the six-month period before your course start date given on your CAS; or 3 months before if you are in the UK and able to apply for a visa here – see section 9 to check if that applies to you.

The visa processing time in most countries is 15 working days after you have given your biometric details (fingerprint and face scan) at a visa application centre as part of your visa application or confirmed your ID using an app (EEA/Swiss students). You can also pay an extra fee for a quicker (priority) service. We recommend you apply as early as you can and at least a month or two before your course start date if possible, as you may also need to wait to get a visa appointment.

3. Planning for when you should arrive in the UK

If you are not a EU, EEA or Swiss national, when you apply for your visa, you will get a 90-day travel visa as a vignette/sticker in your passport and you will collect a Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) card with the full length of your student visa (i.e. your course end date plus some additional time) after you arrive in the UK.

Your travel visa (vignette/sticker in your passport) can start up to a maximum of a month before the course start date given on your CAS. For courses, or periods of study, shorter than six months the visa can only start a maximum of seven days before the course start date. You should decide on an arrival date that allows time for any quarantine you might need to complete before your course starts. When you are completing the online visa application, you will be asked for the ‘intended travel date’ you plan to arrive in the UK. When it is issued, your visa will have a start date that is seven days before the ‘intended travel date’ for arrival you put in the application, or if this would be more than a month before your course start date, your travel visa start date will only be one month before your course start date.

The travel visa (vignette/sticker) will be valid for 90 days. You can enter the UK on any day of the 90-day visa validity, you don’t have to arrive on the travel date you put in your visa application if you need to change it. You cannot arrive before the travel visa starts.
Note that as the visa application process requires the vignette/sticker to be affixed in your passport you will need to send in your passport to the visa application centre at some point and you will not be able to travel to other countries whilst this is being done. For questions about passport validity periods, see our webpage with FAQs about your CAS.

If you are an EU, EEA or Swiss national your visa will be issued electronically, not as a sticker in your passport, and you will not need to submit the passport during the visa application, but the start date will be calculated as above.

4. Visa time limit for studying in the UK

There is a five-year time limit for studying at undergraduate level in the UK on a Student visa, or old-style Tier 4 visa. For detailed information on how the time limit works, see the UKCISA website. If you are coming for an undergraduate course which you think exceeds the time limit, please contact Student Immigration for advice. The time limit for studying at postgraduate level was removed in October 2020.

5. English language tests and your visa application

When you apply for your visa you will not have to provide evidence of English language ability because either we will confirm in your CAS that you have met the requirement (and the method we used to check this) or if you are a national of an English speaking majority country as listed by the Home Office your passport will be accepted as evidence.

6. Check if you need an Academic Technology Approval scheme (ATAS) certificate

ATAS is only required for some graduate courses in Medical Sciences, Maths, Physical and Life Sciences and four-year undergraduate Masters exit awards in Physics and Materials. Nationals of some countries are exempt from the requirement as explained on our website.

Your offer letter will include information on ATAS if you need to apply for a certificate for your visa application and you must use the research statement agreed with your supervisor (graduate students) or the list of modules (undergraduate students). You can apply for ATAS before you receive your CAS and you do not need to wait until your offer is unconditional, so the earlier you apply the better and then it will not delay your visa application later in the summer. We recommend applying for ATAS in May or June, so if you have not applied yet please do so as soon as possible.

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 four-year 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.

Make sure you have received this information from your department or college and use it for your ATAS application.

It will take 30 working days, or sometimes longer, from when you apply online to get the certificate. There is no charge. The certificate will be sent by email and is valid for six months to use with a visa application, if you do not apply for a visa within six months you will need to apply for a new ATAS certificate.
7. Check if you need Tuberculosis screening

Depending on where you have been living recently, you might need to be screened for Tuberculosis at a listed clinic and include the certificate with your visa application. You can check if this applies to you and find out more on this UK government webpage about Tuberculosis tests.

Note that the exemption mentioned for a ‘returning UK resident’ only applies to people who have previously been granted a permanent right to live in the UK and does not apply to student visa holders.

If you need to get a TB certificate, arrange the test as soon as you can and you do not need to wait for your offer to become unconditional or for your CAS to be issued so do this as soon as possible. The TB certificate will be valid for six months to use with a visa application.

8. How to apply for a student visa from outside the UK

Our website has a comprehensive guide for Oxford students about applying for a student visa which explains each step of the online application form.

You must complete all parts of the visa application process and have your visa approved before you travel. You will not be able to complete your visa application in the UK if you leave your home country before you get your visa, and you will not be able to enrol on your course if you arrive without your student visa.

9. If you are already in the UK

It is important to know that if you are in the UK as a visitor, you are not allowed to make your Student visa application in the UK or enrol on your course. You will need to leave the UK and complete the student visa application process and have your visa granted before re-entering the UK.

If you are in the UK on a different kind of visa (excluding visitor or short-term study visa), you may be able to study on that visa without changing it, or you can apply to switch to a student visa without leaving the UK. Please check by emailing student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk. Note that if you are able to study on another type of visa, this might mean you are not eligible to apply for the Graduate route visa (to stay on and work) when you have finished your course as this route requires you to have been on a student visa for a certain period.

If you are currently in the UK on a student or old style Tier 4 visa you will need a new student visa for your new course and you could apply for it without leaving the UK if you meet the Home Office academic progression requirement and if there is a gap after the end of your last visa and the start of your course, either the gap is not more than 28 days or your new course starts not later than 27 September 2021. You can read more on our page about applying in the UK.

If you can apply in the UK and are currently studying with a visa sponsored by a different institution before you enrol on your Oxford course, you must either:
  - have been granted a new visa for Oxford, OR
  - show evidence you have applied for a visa for Oxford and are waiting for a decision i.e. the payment receipt or evidence of a submitted application

If you do not provide the evidence of either above, you will not be able to start the course.

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If you were studying at Oxford previously, and starting a new (second) course here you 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 19 November 2021) or before your visa expires if sooner.

10. 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 Student visa requirements.

The UK Government webpage explains the Student visa financial requirement and you should read it carefully to avoid any problems with your visa application.

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 for a spot check during the process, although this is a rare occurrence.

Our website and Oxford guide to completing the online student visa application form also has information on the financial requirement.

11. Your family members

Your family members can only apply as your dependants if you are coming for a postgraduate course of 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 see our website 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 this route repeatedly. Visitors are not eligible for NHS treatment or publicly funded schooling and are not allowed to work. During the pandemic, it will not be possible for visitors to come from 'red list' countries.

12. New Graduate Route visa (to stay on and work)

Starting from 1 July 2021 this new visa allows student visa holders who have successfully completed their degree to stay on for two years (3 years for DPhil students) to look for and start work. Our webpage has detailed information and FAQs on the Graduate route.

Further information and help

If your questions are not answered on our student visa website, FAQs about your CAS number or in the Oxford guide to completing the online visa application form or if you need further advice, you can ask the University Visa Advisers for help.

Please note that during the busy summer period it may take a few days for us to reply but for urgent queries we will try to reply as soon as possible. Remember to quote your full name or student number in your email enquiry so we can quickly find your course record and personal details.

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