

Visitors from overseas: a guide for Academics

Purpose of this guide

Visitors coming to the University from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) are required by the Home Office to enter the UK under an immigration category appropriate for their intended activity.

This short guide outlines the Home Office rules about visitors coming to Oxford from outside the EEA. We hope you will find it useful when planning visits.

Why is this important?

Oxford sponsors around 1000 Tier 2 (employees) and Tier 5 (non-employees) research and academic staff as well as many Tier 4 students. To retain our Home Office sponsorship licences we must comply with all Home Office rules – including for visitors.

We also want to ensure our visitors have a trouble free journey to Oxford and are not stopped at the airport to be questioned by immigration officials, or worse, prevented from entering the UK.

A little forward planning and, where necessary, asking advice from your HR Lead (who will in turn seek advice from the Staff Immigration Team, where required), should avoid any breaches of the immigration rules or difficulties for your visitors.

In cases where a visitor does get into difficulty entering the UK, we can contact the Home Office for help, but it becomes much more difficult if the visitor's visa arrangements are incorrect.

Who do the visitor immigration rules apply to?

Nationals of EEA member states and those already in the UK on a work visa may visit the University without restriction. A list of EEA member states can be found at www.gov.uk/eu-eea.

However, anyone who is currently overseas and is **not** a national of an EEA member state will need to enter the UK with the correct type of visitor visa.

To obtain the right visitor visa a letter of invitation from the host department or college must be issued to the visitor as soon as possible. Depending on their nationality and the nature of the visit, some visitors will need to make a visa application in advance of travel whilst others will need to make their application when they arrive at immigration control in the UK.

Staff Immigration Team

University of Oxford

<https://staffimmigration.admin.ox.ac.uk>



What do I need to do?

Before a visit is agreed, contact your department or college HR Lead or department/faculty administrator to check internal processes for visitors in your department. Once a visit is agreed, they will advise the individual (with assistance from the Staff Immigration Team) on the appropriate immigration route for the agreed activity and prepare/direct you to a template letter of invitation to be sent to the visitor for their entry application.

The HR Lead or department/faculty administrator is also required to check and copy the visitor's passport and visa when they arrive at Oxford so visitors should be directed to the relevant person on their first day so that copies can be taken. Copies are required for all visitors who have been issued with a letter of invitation to aid their entry into the UK where the visit is for more than one day.

Types of visitor visa

There are three relevant visitor immigration categories;

- Business Visitor
- Academic Visitor and
- Permitted Paid Engagement (PPE) Visitor.

Home Office rules define permitted activities under each category and there are specific restrictions about any payments and the length of visit (details on next page).

There are no provisions under the visitor immigration routes for non-EEA visitors to work on University research projects or for students to take part in research internships. However, a separate visa route exists (Tier 5) for these categories which may be suitable. Your HR Lead or department/faculty administrator can give you advice on Tier 5.

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What can overseas visitors do at Oxford?

Academic Visitors may take part in independent research whilst on sabbatical leave, gather information or advise on an international project led from the UK (i.e. through meetings) give a one-off or short series of talks (provided these are not commercial events and the organiser is not making a profit) or take part in a formal exchange programme. Senior medical doctors may take part in research, teaching and clinical practice. Visitors under this route must be employed by an academic institution overseas; retired persons are not eligible.

Business Visitors may take part in business activity such as attending meetings, conferences or interviews, giving a one-off or short series of talks (provided these are not commercial events and the organiser is not making a profit) or gathering information for their employment overseas including planning future research collaborations (but not conducting research).

Permitted Paid Engagement (PPE) Visitors may come to give lectures in their subject area (but must not be fulfilling a teaching role) or be an examiner. All PPE visitors must be paid a fee (there is no minimum). Visitors under this route must be employed by an academic institution overseas; retired persons are not eligible. Full details of permitted activity and restrictions of each category can be found at <https://staffimmigration.admin.ox.ac.uk/visitor-visas>

The table below defines some common activities undertaken by visitors to Oxford and potential immigration routes:

| Activity | Possible immigration route* | Payment | Max. length of visit |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Giving a single or series of lectures/talks | Business visitor | None or Expenses only | 6 months |
| | Academic visitor | None or Expenses only | 12 months |
| | PPE visitor | Payment of fee required | 1 month |
| | Tier 5 | Funding required | 2 years |
| Speaking at a conference | Business visitor | None or Expenses only | 6 months |
| | Academic visitor | None or Expenses only | 12 months |
| | PPE visitor | Payment of fee required | 1 month |
| Attending a conference | Business visitor | None or Expenses only | 6 months |
| | Academic visitor | None or Expenses only | 12 months |
| Attending meetings (i.e. to discuss future research collaborations) | Business visitor | None or Expenses only | 6 months |
| Sharing knowledge/experience of techniques, theories etc. but not conducting research on University projects | Academic visitor | None or Expenses only | 12 months |
| Observe research conducted at the University and gather information and facts to inform own research overseas (but not working on the project) | Business visitor | None or Expenses only | 6 months |
| Advise on a project which is led from the UK (but not working on the project) | Business visitor | None or Expenses only | 6 months |
| Conducting independent research whilst on sabbatical leave | Academic visitor | None or Expenses only | 12 months |
| Collaborative research on University projects | Tier 5 | Funding required | 2 years |
| Viewing University collections not available to the public for independent research | Academic visitor | None or Expenses only | 12 months |
| Formal exchange of researchers (i.e. a pre-arranged exchange of research personnel between Oxford and another institution on a formal exchange agreement). | Academic visitor | None or Expenses only | 12 months |
| Senior medical doctors taking part in research, teaching or clinical practice | Academic visitor | None or Expenses only | 12 months |
| Overseas students taking part in research internships | Tier 5 | Funding required | 2 years |
| Attending a job interview | Business visitor | None or Expenses only | 6 months |

* Please ensure all restrictions and requirements of the immigration route are met.

Details can be found at <https://staffimmigration.admin.ox.ac.uk/visitor-visas> If there is any doubt about the correct immigration route, the HR Lead or department/faculty administrator should discuss with the Staff Immigration Team well in advance of the intended visit.