



German Freshers' Guide

- English -

WELCOME!

Congratulations – you’ve made it and received an offer to study in Oxford! This guide contains useful information for all students who will take up their studies in Oxford soon. From bank accounts to telephone providers and travel options – many generations have faced similar problems when they first set foot in their new home, and this guide collects all the experiences and advice from people who have previously been in a similar position to you.

If you have questions that are not answered in this guide, the committee and members of the Oxford German Society are always happy to help you! You can contact us at contact@oxford-germansoc.co.uk. We also recommend you to sign up to our *Patensystem* – you can find more information about this in the welcome letter which you received from us.

We are looking forward to welcoming you in Oxford soon! Even though settling in may seem complicated at first, you will quickly find that the transition is much easier than you think, and you will quickly get to grips with everything. And if not we are always there to help!

The Committee of the Oxford German Society 2018-19



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FINANCES

How do I best exchange Euros and Pounds?

SEPA transfers do not seem to offer a particularly good exchange rate, despite the new IBAN system. Some German banks offer free checking accounts, which can be used to withdraw money abroad free of charge using a credit card (e.g. DKB). Even larger amounts always work well, and the exchange rate is the stock market price of the previous day. The only disadvantage is that, if you want to use an English bank account for your everyday transactions, you have to withdraw a large amount of money once a month and bring it to the English bank.

An alternative to SEPA transfers are online services such as [TransferWise](#), which offer the current exchange rate. Transfers are made within one day (sometimes even within a few minutes), but only a small fee will be charged for each transfer.

What bank should I open a bank account with?

As an EU citizen, most banks will offer you the same conditions as they offer British students, and you will be able to open a free basic account with virtually any large English bank, which can be used for transfers, online payments and cash withdrawals.

At the Freshers' Fair you will meet representatives of most major banks, and the University provides information comparing the offers of various banks. Once you've decided yourself for a bank, you'll need to open an account in a branch (most banks are on High Street or Cornmarket Street). To open an account you will need a "proof of residence" – this can be an invoice from your landlord, or, if you live in college, a confirmation letter confirming that you do live in college, which must be signed by your college office. Often, the certificate of enrolment is used for this purpose.



ACCOMODATION AND ADMINISTRATION

What is my new address if I live in College?

Every student has a mailbox in the Porter's Lodge of the College, called "pigeon hole" or simply "pidge". Both letters and larger parcels can be delivered to your pigeon hole and picked up at any time. Your address will be your name and the address of your college.

Where can I retrieve a certificate of enrolment?

A certificate of enrollment can be printed out at <https://evasion.ox.ac.uk/> after registering in in Freshers' Week. You can get a signed certificate at the College Office. Until you can print out your certificate you can also use letters from the university or your college as proofs.

Where can I find accommodation outside of College?

Undoubtedly, Oxford is a hard place to find affordable rooms/houses. Outside of College or University owned accommodation, things get quite difficult. However, most of the student shared-rooms/flats are advertised via Facebook. Just join the "[OxGradHousing](#)" group and either ask for flatmates or look out for offers. But if you do look for your own place or if you already know with whom you want to live with, check out local agencies like Lucy properties, NOPS etc. Some of those agencies require a UK-based guarantor.

Where can I find bedding, sockets adapters and other things I need at the beginning?

The shopping center Boswells in Broad Street offers a wide selection of everyday utensils. A slightly cheaper option is the Westgate Shopping Center at the end of Queen Street, where there are plenty of shops offering everything you could need. Alternatively, you can order everything you need directly via Amazon or other online shops into your College.



TRAVELLING TO OXFORD

The Deutsche Bahn offers Spartickets with which you can travel from 59,90 € from any German station to London. It is worth booking these early – a great advantage is that the luggage restriction is very generous. Otherwise, cheap airlines fly to the airports Stansted, Gatwick and Luton in London, and also to Birmingham. These airports are connected to Oxford by coach (National Express) and train. The London airport with the best connection to Oxford is Heathrow, from where the Oxford Bus Company brings you to Oxford within 90 minutes. The airport with the overall fastest connection is Birmingham, from where you can take the train to Oxford in just one hour. However, if the train is not booked in advance using a special offer, the bus is definitely the cheaper option. Stansted is an option but bear in mind that the journey on the coach to Oxford takes a few hours.

From the London city center you can either take a bus or train to Oxford. The Oxford Tube and X90 bus lines connect Oxford and London in just under 90 minutes (but it can take much longer during peak travel times). For these, a (period) return ticket is **significantly cheaper** than two individual trips. The ticket allows you to take the return journey at any time within the next three months. Alternatively, you can also travel by train, which takes less than one hour, and if you book online in advance (www.trainline.com) tickets may also be cheaper than bus tickets. If you plan to take the train more regularly, buying a “16-25 Railcard” might pay off (it gives you 33% discount on all train tickets for 30 pounds per year).

With regards to mobility in Oxford itself, you are best equipped with a bicycle. You will also be fine with your own foot, though, given that one almost never has to walk for more than 30 minutes to get anywhere, and most points of interest can easily be reached in less than 15 minutes. Buses also run regularly and bus stops can be found all over the city, but walking is often faster. Especially in early October you can find bicycles for a good price in many bike shops in the city as well as in Cowley, a district a bit outside the city centre.



MOBILE PHONE PROVIDERS

The best way to pick a mobile phone provider is to find out what the JCR or MCR of your college recommends as signal strengths vary within Oxford, and you will spend a lot of time in your college. For most major providers you will find people who dislike them, and others who highly recommend them. For undergrads, who travel home between the terms, a prepaid card is in any case the best choice – such cards are offered by many providers. When picking your tariff, keep in mind that you will use relatively little data volume in Oxford itself, since almost the entire inner city is covered by the university WiFi eduroam.

Also, roaming charges were abolished within the EU in June 2017, which is why you can also use your German SIM card in England (possibly depending on special conditions of your German provider).

In general, it is worth mentioning that chat services based on mobile phone numbers (e.g. WhatsApp) are much less popular in England than in Germany – the most popular communication medium, by far, is the Facebook Messenger.



FORMAL OCCASIONS AND AN OVERVIEW OF DRESS CODES

Dress codes in Oxford can sometimes be confusing, and may seem almost threatening from the distance. In reality, however, everything is much more relaxed once you're there, and you will quickly get used to the little details! Generally, it is always worth to ask friends going to the same event what they are wearing. The most common dress codes for social events are "Smart"/"Informal", "Semi-Formal"/"Formal" and "Black Tie".

For your matriculation, you must wear "sub fusc", more information on which can be found on the university website. The gown, hat and ribbon can be bought cheaply in many shops throughout Oxford. You should best bring a dark suit and white tie or dark trousers/skirt and a white shirt from home.

If you are intending to go more formal events like drinks receptions, balls and formal dinners, you may need more specific outfits. All these dress codes, however, are slightly varying for each occasion. For invites that are advertised as "Smart", you can expect a more informal environment. Sometimes you may just dress as you would in a more formal workplace. As a rule of thumb; no jeans, no shorts, no t-shirts.

Events that require "formal" or "semi-formal" attire are often dinners in College. Both terms are sometimes used to describe the same dress code and they usually asks for suits and tie for men and dresses/suits for women.

The term "Black Tie" requires a dinner jacket/tuxedo. It is sometimes accepted if you simply wear a black suit with a black bow tie (and equivalent for women). Otherwise, you can buy or borrow dinner jackets in all price categories in many shops in Oxford (roughly about £40-60). However, if you stay in Oxford for more than a year, it is worth buying your own one or bring it from home.

FIGHTING HOMESICKNESS

One of the things many of us miss most is high-quality bread. Toast and other kinds of white bread are more popular in England than in Germany, and good bread of the kind you find at home can be hard to come by.

Lucky for Germans in Oxford, the German Bakery of Windsor drives a van around England every week, stopping in several locations in Oxford every Friday. Apart from pretzels, they also offer German staples such as canned Sauerkraut and all kinds of candy. Their timetable can be found [here](#).

Another excellent bakery is [GAIL's](#) with stores in Jericho and Summertown, two neighborhoods in west and north Oxford respectively. Their products are a bit more expensive than toast in a supermarket, but well worth it. They have particularly good bread and cakes.

CONTACTS IN OXFORD & USEFUL LINKS

You will find further useful informations on the following sites:

Website of the Oxford German Society: www.oxford-germansoc.co.uk

Facebook page of the Oxford German Society: <https://www.facebook.com/OxfordGermanSociety>

Facebook group of the Oxford German Society:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/632063316860864/>

You should also sign up for our newsletter to get the latest information about our events once a week.

You can sign up here: <http://groupspaces.com/oxford-germansoc/join/>

Please let us know if you have any further questions or feedback about this guide! You can contact us at contact@oxford-germansoc.co.uk.



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