

Zoology Early Career Researchers' Network

Advice for new starters 2018

Coming to Oxford as an early career researcher can be an exciting and daunting experience. Here's a list of key tips that the Zoology Early Careers Research Network (ECRN) have pulled together from our collective experience to help you with your transition. We have provided lots of general tips, as well as tips specifically for international new starters.

The Department of Zoology is a social and friendly place. Come meet your colleagues over free **tea/coffee and cake** every Thursday from 3:30pm. The first Friday of every month is **Happy Hour** with drinks and snacks provided from 4:30pm.

You can find out more about the ECRN and keep in touch with us via the [Zoology website](#), the [Zoology ECRN on Facebook](#), and/or Twitter (@ZooOxECRN).

We aim to keep this document up to date with new information and tips for newcomers, so please send through any tips you have to our ECRN officers listed on our [webpage](#).

General tips

- 1) Do your research before the big move.** The University of Oxford [advice for newcomers](#) and [international staff welcome page](#) will be useful resources. Once you have an Oxford login/email address, you can register your interest to attend one of the regularly run university-wide Welcome Events for Research Staff [here](#). We also recommend searching for relevant Facebook groups to join, like the [Zoology ECRN](#)!
- 2) Getting set up in the Zoology Department.** Upon arrival, go to the Personnel office to collect your university card. Activation of your university card will automatically give you a Zoology email address. It is also important that you register your laptop with IT for access to the intranet and the ethernet.
- 3) Accommodation.**

General tips:

- **Timeline:** Most long-term accommodation in Oxford will be advertised 4-6 weeks before it is available, and good places tend to go fast. So it may be worth arranging short-term accommodation ahead of your arrival (or for a visit if possible), and looking for a long-term rental after you arrive. Rental contracts are normally for 12 months (occasionally 6 months) to start, after which you may sign a new fixed-term contract or may switch to a month-to-month rolling contract. If you want to leave ahead of your fixed term, you will be responsible for finding a replacement and may have to pay a fee (especially if you are with a letting agency) for the tenant change.
- **Letting agencies vs. private landlords:** There are many professional letting companies in Oxford who manage a large number of properties (see the list on [Daily info](#)). Registering with one of these agents is an easy way to get a list of properties meeting your criteria and get viewings of many properties in a day, if you are in a rush. In addition to their own websites, these agents tend to advertise their properties on websites such as [Rightmove](#) and [Zoopla](#), where you can search listings from multiple agents in one place according to your search

criteria. If you go through a letting agency, make sure you get a full list of fees they charge (these are not included in the advertised monthly rent!) and calculate these into your budget. The other option is to deal directly with a private landlord advertising their property independently. These tend to be advertised on websites such as [Gumtree](#) and [Daily Info](#). Private landlords likely will not have additional fees, but may also have less standardized procedures and expectations than an agency. You can also find listings through [Oxford Student Pad](#) (not just for students!), which offers a secure portal to search for lettings managed by private landlords associated to university.

- **Total costs:** In addition to monthly rent (which is expensive in Oxford!), you will have to pay [Council Tax](#), which is paid monthly to Oxford City Council and can add up to roughly £1000-2000 per year, depending on the area in which you live and other factors (e.g. number of occupants at the property). Usually Council Tax is not included in the monthly rent, but sometimes it is, so keep this in mind when comparing properties according to your budget (ask what band of council tax the property is in and check corresponding taxes on the council website, as these do change). If you live alone you can get a 25% discount on your council tax, but it's not automatic and you have to apply for it [online](#). Finally, consider utility costs (gas, electricity, water, optionally phone/Internet) – ask your future housemates or the previous tenants for an estimate.
- **Furnished vs. unfurnished:** Both rental property types are common in Oxford. If you are coming from overseas without furniture, or if you prefer to have your own furniture, this is definitely something to look out for in property listings.
- **Your rights as a renter:** The university has a useful [checklist](#) for rental properties and the [Citizens Advice Bureau](#) can advise you on your rights as a renter, among other tips.
- **Additional tips** for your housing search in Oxford are available from [Daily Info](#) and the [University accommodation website](#)

Where to look:

- **Short-term accommodation options:** [Oxford Student Pad](#); [Commonwealth House](#); [Rewley House](#); [North Oxford Overseas Centre](#); [Short Let Space](#); [Abodes of Oxford](#); [Midsomer Cottage](#); [Five Mile Guest House](#); [YHA Oxford youth hostel](#); [University Rooms](#) (in Oxford University colleges); [AirBnB](#)
- [Oxford Student Pad](#) advertises private housing options available to staff as well as students.
- [The Oxford University Gazette](#) often includes rental property listings (both short- and long-term) in the advertising section.
- You can find rooms for rent in [EasyRoommate](#), [SpareRoom](#), and [GumTree](#).
- Private landlords tend to advertise on [Gumtree](#) and [Daily Info](#).
- Letting agencies have their own websites (see list of local agencies [here](#)), or you can search listings from multiple agencies according to your search criteria at [Rightmove](#) or [Zoopla](#).
- Used furniture and household items can be found on [Gumtree](#) and [Freecycle](#). [Emmaus](#) has a large used furniture store in Cowley. They will also pick up furniture you no longer want if you ring them to arrange it.

4) Transport within and beyond Oxford.

- **Bike:** Cycling is an environmentally friendly way to travel, and is often faster than walking, driving, or taking the bus in Oxford. Buy bike lights as the police do regular checks at commonly used routes around the city. The police also recommend cyclists wear bike

helmets. You can find second hand bikes on [Gumtree](#) and [Daily Info](#) websites, as well as new and used bikes in the many bike shops around Oxford (e.g. [Cycle King](#), [Beeline Bicycles](#), [Walton Street Cycles](#), [Summertown Cycles](#)). The University of Oxford offers staff an [interest-free loan](#) for the purchase of a bicycle and associated safety equipment. More information on cycling in Oxford, including links to bike sharing/hire schemes, is also available on the [university webpage](#). The [University cycle repair scheme](#) operates Wednesdays outside the University Club and offers free labour on the bicycle you use to cycle to work when you show your university staff card (you only pay for parts). The [Broken Spoke Bike Co-op](#) is also a great place to go to get help repairing your own bike and/or share your skills with others.

- **Local buses:** The [Oxford Bus Company](#) and [Stagecoach Company](#) offer good deals for frequent travellers. The University of Oxford offers staff a [Discounted Bus Pass Scheme](#) on particular routes operated by the Oxford Bus Company (including Thames Travel) and Stagecoach.
- **Buses out of Oxford:** You can reach London day or night by the [Oxford Tube](#) or [X90](#) buses. To reach other UK destinations, you can travel by [National Express](#) or [Megabus](#). [The main bus station is at Gloucester Green, but many buses make other stops in Oxford \(e.g. St. Clements and Headington for buses travelling to London\).](#)
- **Trains:** The [train station is located](#) just west of the city centre. There are many private companies operating trains in the UK, but you can search for train connections across multiple operators and buy tickets on [Trainline](#) or the [National Rail](#) website. Chiltern Railways offers the cheapest rail link between Oxford and London. If you travel regularly by train, consider getting a [Railcard](#) for discounts of 1/3 off fares.
- **Reaching nearby airports:** The Oxford Bus Company runs [The Airline](#) buses to Heathrow and Gatwick airports. For Luton and Stansted, National Express runs [Bus Route 737](#), or check train connections via London. Birmingham Airport is also easily reached by a direct train from Oxford.

5) Oxford University clubs etc.

- The [Oxford Research Staff Society \(OxRSS\)](#) advocates for ECRs and organises social and professional events for ECRs across the university. If you attend a Welcome Event for Research Staff organized by the Oxford Learning Institute (register your interest [here](#)), you will be automatically added to the OxRSS mailing list. Otherwise, you can join the mailing list by sending a blank email to researchstaff-subscribe@maillist.ox.ac.uk
- [Oxford University Sport](#) list of sporting groups/clubs and facilities
- [The University Club](#): membership is free and offers benefits such as access to the café/bar, discounted accommodation, venue hire, and gym membership for £65/year.
- [Oxford University Student Societies list](#) – including musical, political, international, and many more clubs.
- [Oxford University Newcomers Club](#), for partners of people studying/working here, arranges days out, meetings, orientation, etc.
- Groups such as the [Conservation Researchers](#) at University of Oxford are a great way to meet and get tips from local researchers in your field.

6) **Enjoy discovering Oxford** with these things [to do in Oxford](#). Also make use of your University staff card by visiting all of the [colleges](#) for free as well as all of the university libraries (like the [Radcliffe Camera](#) and [Duke Humfrey's Library](#)). For more gigs, talks

and events, check [Daily Info Events](#); [University of Oxford Events](#); [University of Oxford Talks](#); [Interesting Talks Oxford](#); [Science Oxford](#).

7) Children and families

[My Family Care](#) is a university benefit providing advice on a range of family responsibilities and a valuable help line.

Childcare and schools: The [university childcare services](#) department aims to provide nursery provision and advice on a variety of parental needs. Be sure to consult the web page for salary sacrifice schemes, which are available to eligible university staff and provide significant savings for nursery, after school care etc.

- Nursery (0-4 yr): For nursery and preschool age, consult [university childcare services](#) and [county council nursery](#) websites. Do not assume that a local nursery will automatically be able to provide for your needs. Both university and non-university nurseries are often at capacity with long waiting lists. Also, be aware that not all nurseries provide for all ages or provide government subsidised care for 3 & 4 year olds.
- School: Children who are 4 years or older on Sep 1st are provided a place in a state school. Allocation of primary and secondary school places is coordinated by the [local council](#) based on both distance to your home and availability. The council website provides advice on locating your nearest primary/secondary schools, admissions and transfers. If moving into the area, you can also locate schools as part of your search through housing websites such as [rightmove.co.uk](#) and [zoopla.co.uk](#), but cross check with the council website which catchment different locations fall into.

Things to do: there are lots of free and cheap things to do with children both in Oxford and in the surrounding villages and towns. Most communities have playgrounds, mother/baby groups, sports and social clubs etc. Websites such as the [oxfordmail](#), [netmums](#) and [dayoutwiththekids](#) may provide ideas, but your best resource are likely fellow parents of which there are many.

Tips for international new starters

- 8) **Visas.** Make sure you have up-to-date travel documents, as you will need a valid [UK visa](#) that will allow you to enter and work in the UK. If you are from outside Europe, the process can take more than a month, so make sure to start on time. Also check the application fee for your visa type (see below) and make sure to budget in the additional [Immigration Health Surcharge](#) of £200/year, which is compulsory and will give you access to NHS (public health coverage) services. Zoology Personnel and the [University of Oxford Staff Immigration](#) team will advise you on the visa type you need, whether visa fees will be covered, and how the process works.

The most common visa route for ECRs is the [Tier 2 \(General\)](#) visa; some ECRs paid by external fellowships may have a [Tier 5 \(Government Authorised Exchange\)](#) visa instead. However, it is worth checking if you are eligible for any other visa type, e.g. if you have familial connections to the UK. For a summary of common visa types, costs, and general guidance, see the [Oxford Staff Immigration Team](#) website. For Tier 2 and Tier 5 visas you will require a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) from the University before applying for your visa. The CoS can be issued at most 3 months before your start date at the University, but the process of issuing a CoS can take a month or two, so be sure to contact Zoology Personnel well in advance. You must apply for

your visa through a visa application centre in a country where you currently have a right to residence; find application centres [here](#). Processing times will vary depending on the application centre. When you apply for your visa, you will usually have to hand in your passport, so keep this in mind when making any other travel plans! Your Tier 2 or Tier 5 visa will normally allow you to enter the UK starting from a specific date (at most 2 weeks before your contract begins) and remain until 2 weeks after your contract ends.

- 9) Healthcare.** If you're staying in the UK for more than 6 months, you might be entitled to healthcare under the National Health Service (NHS). The Zoology personnel team will advise you whether you will be eligible for this. Shortly after arrival, you can search for local GPs near your home or college and register to one. Note that it is compulsory be registered with a GP to receive any non-emergency health care, and can also be a requirement e.g. to obtain UK-based travel insurance.

You can find useful information about how health care works in the UK on the [NHS](#) website. Here you can also search for [GPs](#) by location.

If you are eligible for NHS and registered with a GP, you can also apply for a free [European Health Insurance Card](#).

- 10) Bank accounts.** UK banks can be strict about requirements for opening a bank account and bank staff will need to verify your details before allowing you an account. On your first day at the Zoology Department, the Personnel staff can give you advice on how to open an account. Basically you will need a dated letter from HR confirming your job in Oxford as a proof of your staff status. You will also need to provide a residential address during your application (banks won't accept a work or college address). However not all banks will have the exact same requirements for proof of address, so it is worth checking these online or in person. Some banks will strictly require a document such as a rental contract or utility bill; some may accept statements sent from your old bank to your new residential address; some may allow a letter from the University stating your address (which may have to be mailed to you at this address to prove you receive it here); some have in our past experience accepted applicants from certain countries with passport identification and no further proof of address. You can read more about opening a bank account [here](#).

Once you have your documents ready, you will have to make an appointment to go in person to a bank to open an account. Most main banks have branches very nearby around the Carfax Tower on High Street, central Oxford. At some banks you can arrange a same-day appointment if you arrive first thing in the morning, while at others you can be waiting for week, so again it's worth shopping around if you are in a hurry to get your account opened.

Finally, your eligibility for a credit card will vary from bank to bank. Generally you will not be able to get a credit card until you have built up a credit rating in the UK, but some banks will have higher hurdles than others (e.g. type of visa/residence permit required). Check with the bank you are considering and ask your fellow international ECRs about their experiences!

- 11) Mobile phones.** Most phones from overseas would work in the UK because the UK operates on the same GSM band as most countries. However, if you are coming from North/South America or Japan, it is worth checking if your phone may work in the UK. If you already have a SIM free phone, the Pay As You Go SIM card is the easiest choice. [GiffGaff](#) offers some good deals and

allows users to cancel at any time. If you make frequent overseas calls, it may be a cheaper option to buy Skype credits, which will allow you to call overseas landlines or mobiles. If you'll be roaming a lot for work / play, then [3 UK](#) (as of 2017) offers great contracts where you can roam and use your monthly allowance in [over 40 countries](#).

You generally won't be able to get a Pay Monthly contract without a credit rating, and getting rejected for a contract can negatively affect whatever credit rating you have already managed to build up. If you are considering getting a Pay Monthly contract you stand a better chance to be accepted if you go for a SIM only option (you can usually upgrade to a contract with a handset in 3-6 months). You also have a better chance to be accepted if you go directly to the provider of your choice rather than a third-party service (such as Carphone Warehouse) or applying online. When you apply make sure that they take into account that you are new to the UK. Also note that different networks have different requirements for accepting you as a Pay Monthly customer.

12) Home internet. [This website](#) is useful for explaining your options for home Internet service (broadband) and comparing providers. You can also check [Compare the Market](#) to compare Internet packages (as well as other utilities and insurances) from various providers, although not all providers are listed here. Most providers require a contract of 12-18 months, although a few offer shorter options.

13) Insurance. The [Money Advice Service](#) provides an explanation of typical insurances available in the UK (e.g. home, car, and travel). Sites such as [comparethemarket.com](#) are again useful for comparing offers. Note that the [University travel insurance policy](#) covers employees for field work, conferences, or other university business.