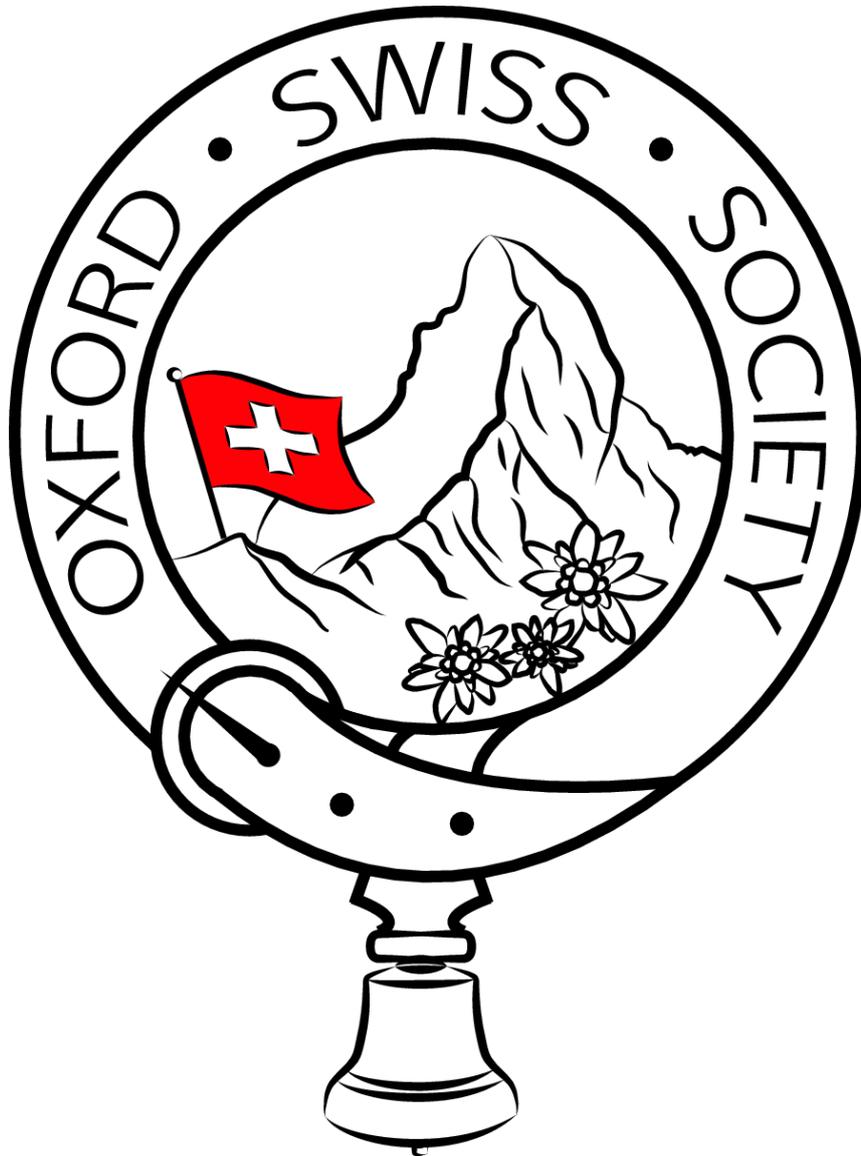


Oxford Swiss Society



Guide for Prospective/New Students



This guide is intended to provide some information on life and studies in Oxford for prospective students and freshers from Switzerland. It is fair to say that life in the 'City of Dreaming Spires' is a unique experience. The extensive range of (sometimes bizarre) traditions lends this place a culture that differs markedly from many other leading universities, possibly with the exception of 'the other place', although nobody in his/her right mind would go there anyway...

Our society is not able to look back at an equally rich range of traditions, but we've managed to create a platform where Swiss and other like-minded people can enjoy some of the things our country has to offer. Talks, society exchanges and culinary events are just some of the activities we've organised in the past, and there is bound to be a rich variety of such occasions in the time ahead.

Due to ever changing circumstances (such as Brexit) we cannot guarantee complete accuracy, but we've tried our best to provide you with relevant details for your stay in Oxford. While most of this guide was written with students enrolled in the University of Oxford in mind, our membership also extends to Oxford Brookes University.

In the name of the whole committee, I hope that we will be able to welcome you at our events in the not so distant future!

Matthias Roesti, President 2017/18



General Information

*„un i ha heimweh nach de Bärge, nachem Schoggi und em Wii
nach dä Wälder, nach dä Seeä u nach em Schnee
un i bi wiit wäg vo deheimä i dr Schtadt woni nid wett sii
un i gloubä es geit o andre mängisch genau es wi mir, genau eso wi mir“
(„Heimweh“ von Püschi)*

- English translation -

*“I feel homesick, I miss the mountains, the chocolate and the wine
[I miss] the forests, the lakes and the snow
And I am far away from home in a city I don't want to be in
And I think other people sometimes feel like I do, exactly like I do”
(“Heimweh” by Plüschi)*

Everyone feels homesick from time to time. But don't worry, there are tested remedies! In this section, we are going to tell you some secrets that will make your stay in Oxford a little more 'Swiss'.

Plüschi sings about missing the Swiss mountains. Agreed, there is no Matterhorn nor Pilatus in the UK and there are definitely no mountains in Oxford. However, if you like going for a hike, there are plenty of interesting trails and courses in Oxford and surroundings. Do check out the following homepage for some specific ideas: <http://www.mapmyhike.com/gb/oxford-eng/>.

Chocolate and wine are indeed precious to most Swiss expats. If our yearly Swiss chocolate tasting event (see termcard) is not enough to satisfy your needs of chocolate, no worries! Most supermarkets sell conventional types of Swiss chocolate, too. For more unconventional sorts you may want to visit 'Hotel Chocolat'. This is a nice chocolaterie located in the ground floor of Westgate Shopping Centre (<https://westgateoxford.co.uk/shops/hotel-chocolat>). But be aware, they offer English chocolate only!

Most Swiss like wine, but so does Oxford University! In every student's life there are plenty of social occasions where wine is going to be served for free. This is most



likely going to happen in your College or your Department, but our society is no exception to the rule! If you are looking for something more exclusive, check out some wine bars in Oxford, for instance “The Oxford Wine Cafe” (<http://oxfordwinecafe.co.uk/>) and the “1855 Wine Bar and Cafe” (<http://www.1855oxford.com/>).

If you, like Plüsch, end up missing forests and lakes, here, too, a solution can be found. Many colleges have their own parks that are usually open to all students free of charge (non-students may have to pay an entrance fee, be aware of the opening hours). Christ Church Meadow, Magdalen Deer Park (deers to see!) and Worcester College Park are all time favourites. The University Park, South Park and Port Meadow are nice alternatives open to the public. Other than that, don’t forget to visit the Botanic Garden and bring your Bodcard (= university card) for a free entrance (<https://www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk/>)!

Finally, Plüsch sings about missing the snow. In this regard, Oxford is very unpredictable. If it does snow, your home sickness may be weakened. However, you will soon realize that after an initial excitement people will start adapting to what is for them is an exceptional circumstance. Working hours may change, lectures may be cancelled, public transportation sometimes stops working... a lot of fun!

Plüsch got that right, *“other people sometimes feel like you do”*! Whether you are homesick or interested in Swiss culture, our society unites those who feel like you do! Feel welcome to join!



Finances - Money Transfer and Bank Account

In general, transferring money directly through your Swiss bank is very expensive. Even banks who don't charge a separate transaction fee usually use an exchange rate that is unfavourable from a customer viewpoint. The cheapest way we are aware of is transferwise (www.transferwise.com), which gives you the theoretical current exchange rate (meaning the midpoint between the current bid-ask spread, which is up to a few percentage points better than what you could get as a retail client) plus a ~0.5% transaction fee.

It is advisable to have a UK bank account because the ability to do fast online payments and to have a debit card in the local currency comes in handy in everyday life. Several banks offer free accounts for students, although these do not usually pay any interest on your money. If you plan on having more than just a few hundred pounds lingering around in your bank account, it is worth checking if it might pay off to switch to a bank or an account with a positive interest rate and (generally low) account fees. At the freshers' fair at the beginning of Michaelmas term, there are usually several banks providing details on student accounts.

Opening an account in the UK as a Swiss student is not complicated, although in addition to a passport, a proof of residence is usually required. This will generally be a signed and stamped letter from your college confirming your address and student status. If you live outside of college accommodation, other documents such as the rental agreement or utility bills can be used to provide evidence of local residence. It is crucial that the name on these documents matches the name on the passport to the letter (even the ä/ö/ü, though they might let that slide), otherwise the bank will most likely refuse to open an account.

If you envisage staying in the UK for a few years and might accumulate some savings (which on a typical DPhil funding scheme is usually no option...), then a so-called 'Individual Savings Account' (ISA) is certainly worth considering. It allows you to accumulate tax-free savings up to a specified amount every year (currently £20,000). Every major bank will offer such an account because they are government regulated. More information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/individual-savings-accounts>.



Finances - Funding

According to the official fee status website of the University (available at <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/fees/status>), individuals who have lived all their life in Switzerland or the EEA will be eligible to pay Home/EU fees. However, your fee status is determined on an individual basis which takes into account: 'your nationality, your immigration status in the UK, where you have been living and what you have been doing for the three years prior to the start of your course'. **Recently, there has been a change in legislation introducing the additional requirement that the Swiss parent of the student has to be UK resident as well in order for home-fee eligibility** (see here: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/fees/status/classification>). **This effectively rules out home fees for most Swiss students, so expect to pay overseas fees if no parent has ever been resident of the UK.**

We would recommend contacting the university to clarify your status, particularly in light of the possible further legislative changes that can occur due to the UK decision to leave the European Union (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/oxford-and-the-eu>).

Available scholarships:

There are few Scholarships that are available exclusively to Swiss students. The biggest and most widely known is the Berrow Foundation Scholarship (<http://www.berrow-society.org>). Successful students will become members of Lincoln College. There are restrictions and conditions for applying students. In the near future, more Swiss-specific scholarships might become available, but this is not confirmed yet – see <https://oxfordfriends.ch/scholarships/> for more details.

It is important to note that there are a variety of Scholarships which are offered to all students, regardless of nationality. These international studentship prizes are common in many of the sciences.

A very useful website for funding information is <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/search/graduate>. On this webpage you can calculate the cost of studying at Oxford for your degree of interest and there is an option to search for relevant scholarships (listed in the 3rd table). Note: some scholarships are dependent on being in specific colleges, so make sure to check if you need to mention a particular college preference in order to be eligible for the funding you have in mind.



Life in Oxford

Housing

- Most colleges have rooms in student halls that you can rent if you are student of that college. You would need to contact the college to find out more about this. In general, college housing information is sent alongside with your admission offer from the college.
- The university can provide accommodation in their own buildings (booked out very quickly): <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/graduateaccommodation/>
- Many students rent from private landlords or through letting agencies, which are numerous. Relevant websites include:
 - o <https://www.spareroom.co.uk>
 - o <https://www.zoopla.co.uk>
 - o Or through the Facebook-group: OxGradHousing
- Be prepared to pay high rents for very limited quality, housing space is scarce in Oxford, so prices and rental conditions tend to reflect that. If you want to live in central Oxford, college accommodation is usually the best deal you will get.
- If you're prepared for a 10 min bike ride into the centre (which is far away for Oxford standards), you may want to look for rooms in Jericho (more expensive 'hipster' area) or Cowley (cheaper 'hipster' area).

Phone contracts

- To be able to purchase a phone contract (either a yearly or 2-year plan), you must have a UK bank account and debit/credit card. Once you have these, you can purchase a phone and phone contract from a variety of providers – a good place to start is Carphone Warehouse which sells a variety of phone and contracts from different network providers.
- Some stores refuse to sell you a phone contract if you have not been resident in the UK for 3 or 6 months (because they can't perform a national credit check on you) - but there are other stores (such as Carphone Warehouse) which are less strict.
- If you do not have a UK bank account, you can always get a pre-paid SIM card



Shopping and getting started

- The main retailers from which most people buy their food and consumables are Tesco, The Cooperative and Sainsbury's. These shops will sell most things you need at a reasonable price and quality. Other shops such as M&S and Waitrose often sell products of better quality and variety, but at an increased price.
- To purchase furniture, room decorations, kitchenware etc., many students shop at Argos, Boswells and/or Debenhams which are all located on/next to Cornmarket street in the centre of the city. The nearest IKEA is located in Milton Keynes – about an hour away by car. However, online deliveries are always possible.
- The recently reopened Westgate shopping centre in central Oxford also has numerous shops for all kinds of products.

Health insurance/medical services in the UK

The NHS (National Health Service) is the publicly funded health service of the UK. In England it is free for people who are ordinarily residents (except dental treatment, optical care and prescription charges). All students who are studying in the UK full-time for a year or more are deemed 'ordinarily resident' and thus they (and their dependents) are entitled to register with the NHS. As a patient, you can access the entire NHS through your College Doctor who is a General Practitioner (GP) but you cannot consult a medical specialist without going through your GP first.

It is a requirement of the NHS and the University that students are registered with a doctor at their University, not at home. Do not further worry about this. Your college will send you all the necessary information and the steps which you must undertake to be registered. This is going to be sent out towards the end of July.

Further information can be found on:

- University website for student welfare: www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare
- University website for student health: www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/health
- Official NHS website: www.nhs.uk



Health insurance in Switzerland

The three options which we are aware of (ask your health insurance company for confirmation!) are:

1. Keep your Swiss Health Insurance

The easiest but most expensive way. You must inform your agency about your planned stay abroad. Note that for travels outside the EEA, you will usually not be covered by your Swiss insurance anymore (typical contracts cover about 6-8 weeks of trips abroad in any given year).

2. Abrogate your Swiss Health Insurance

You can abrogate the contract which exempts you from paying the monthly health insurance contribution. In order to be legally allowed to abrogate your contract you need to deregister at your living address in Switzerland. We recommend starting this process 2 months before departing to Oxford. It is important to know that a reregistration after your stay abroad can become complicated, especially if your health situation changed.

3. Suspend your Swiss Health Insurance

Our recommended option if you plan to stay for more than one year. You can suspend the contract (for max. 2 years). It exempts you from paying the monthly health insurance contribution, only a monthly continuation fee of 5 Fr. will be charged. The big advantage of this option is that you can return to your Swiss health insurance company, after 2 years, having the same insurance coverage as before you left. In order to be legally allowed to do that you need to deregister at your living address in Switzerland. We recommend starting this process 2 months before departing to Oxford.