Eligibility Criteria: Guidelines for Applicants to the Cambridge Foundation Year

Overview

The purpose of this document is to help potential applicants understand whether they meet the eligibility criteria for the Cambridge Foundation Year. The document itself outlines how applicants will be asked to evidence their eligibility for verification purposes during the application process. Further information about the course is available at cam.ac.uk/foundationyear.

The Foundation Year intends to address educational disadvantage and disruption; this may manifest in various forms for applicants. To be considered for the programme, you should meet one or more criteria from at least two of the categories detailed below (unless you are care-experienced) and will ordinarily be resident in the UK. The criteria are a gateway to consideration and your experiences will not be compared to others.

Some of the information provided in this document may seem complicated, but that should not deter you from applying. We are providing this detail to ensure that applicants only use one of their UCAS choices on the course- if they are eligible.

We advise skipping directly to the sections that are relevant to you using the table of contents on the next page. If you have any further questions, you can email foundation.year@admin.cam.ac.uk for advice. If you are a mature student and are unclear on how some of these guidelines apply, please visit our website for further information.

Please note: these guidelines apply for applications made for 2022 entry.
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**Verification process**

Verifying eligibility is an important part of ensuring that the programme can support the students it has been designed for. In some cases, we will be able to use datasets and publically available information, but in many cases, the circumstances are so individual to you that we will need you to tell us more or provide us with the documentation we would otherwise be unable to see.

There is nothing additional that you will need to do as part of your UCAS application (unless you have been in care – see below).

After applying, you will receive an email with an additional application questionnaire from us that we will ask you to complete online within a set timeframe. You must complete it in this timeframe so we can consider your application further. Only applications we have verified as eligible can be assessed further.

In completing the additional application questionnaire online, you will be asked to indicate which criteria you meet, and to upload evidence in some cases. You will be able to see below the kind of documentation that might be required.

In some instances, you may need to find the relevant documentation or request it from your parent(s)/carer(s), school/college or other services such as your GP or social worker. It is advised that you speak with them as soon as possible to ensure they can provide you with what you need on time. In some cases, for example, where the required evidence could be conveyed in a letter from your school, the same letter could cover a number of the criteria. If the document requested is a letter, we expect this to be on letter-headed paper including a point of contact name as we may follow up to verify.

While to be eligible you only need to meet one criterion from two of the three categories, we recommend you check all criteria that you meet and provide the requested evidence for these.

We appreciate that the documentation you provide is personal and may contain sensitive information about yourself or your family. The information is only used to verify eligibility and will never be shared or used for any other purpose. The exact nature of your circumstances has no bearing on admissions decisions and decisions are ultimately awarded on academic suitability. Documentation is held securely following our Data Protection policies.¹

If an applicant or referee was found to have been misleading or have made false claims in their application, the applicant would be removed from consideration. If they had already been admitted and started or completed their studies, the applicant could be liable for the full delivery cost of the course.

¹ https://www.information-compliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/data-protection/applicant-data
Eligibility Guidelines

Specified time periods in these guidelines relate either to periods of schooling (such as 'while in secondary education') or periods of time (such as 'in the last four years'). Where periods of time have been specified, this is as of the last possible date for applications. For 2022 entry, this is 15 January 2022.

Care-experienced applicants

Those who are currently in local authority care, or who have been in care previously while in education for any length of time, are automatically eligible for this programme. This means that you do not have to meet the criteria in any of the other categories.

There is a field on your UCAS application that you should fill in if you’ve spent time in local authority care. It also asks you to provide the duration of time you have spent in care.

In the additional application questionnaire, we will ask you to provide evidence. This could be a letter from someone in the Local Authority responsible for your care.

Category 1: Individual Characteristics

Many of the criteria refer to ‘secondary education’. This means pre-university education, usually between the ages of 11 and 18/19, but some mature students may have returned to education later. It includes the full range of school/college types in the UK. We also refer to ‘school/college’, meaning the institution you attended such as a Further Education college or secondary school.

The criteria in this category reflect disrupted education, qualification availability and Special Educational Needs.

You have experienced medical/health issues that have resulted in long or extended periods of absence (over 8 weeks) from school/college whilst in secondary education

There are no limitations on the kind of medical/health issues that you have experienced, so it could include physical or mental health issues and either chronic or acute conditions. Anything that has caused extended periods of absence counts (8 weeks or more), although we would expect that the extent of the disruptions will mean this is something that has resulted in you seeking medical treatment.

The 8 weeks (or longer) could have been in one block or could have been a series of shorter but recurring absences due to a single condition.
You will be expected to verify your eligibility under this criterion. You could ask your GP or another medical professional who knows about your care to provide a letter that details long term sickness certification they have provided to your school/college. Alternatively, you could ask your school/college to provide a letter based on their knowledge of your attendance and reasons for absence which includes detail about the length of your absences.

You have experienced bereavement due to the death of a close family member whilst in secondary education (for example your parent/carer)

In this context, close family members mean your immediate family such as siblings, parent(s) or carer(s). It also includes anyone who shared the same household as you at the time of their death.

To help us verify your eligibility under this criterion, we ask that your school/college writes a letter based on their awareness of your family situation. Alternatively, if this is not possible or you would prefer, we would also accept other documentation such as a copy of the death certificate accompanied by your explanation of the nature of your relationship (for example, they were your father, or they were your grandmother but your primary carer). If you are unable to provide this, please contact us for further guidance.

You have been a young carer while in education

A young carer is a person under 18 who regularly provides emotional and/or practical support and assistance for a family member who is disabled, physically or mentally unwell or who misuses substances.

There is no requirement for you to provide documentary verification for this criterion, however, if you have been assessed by your Local Authority you could provide correspondence or evidence of that. If your school are aware of your responsibilities, they could also write a letter you could attach in support. If you can’t provide this, we will ask you to complete a short description of the situation, although detail is not necessary.

You have become a parent while in education

To be eligible under this criterion, you will have become a parent (either mother or father) while in education.

You will need to provide evidence of your relationship with your child. A birth certificate showing your name as one of the child’s parents will suffice.
You became homeless while in education

If you became homeless while in education, you might have had nowhere to stay and been living on the streets. However, you would also qualify under this criterion if you, for example, ended up staying with friends; stayed in a hostel, night shelter or B&B.

There is no requirement for you to provide documentary verification for this criterion, however, if you have evidence of being ‘legally’ homeless such as correspondence with your local council relating to short-term emergency housing. If you can’t provide this, we will ask you to complete a short description of the situation, although detail is not necessary.

You have Refugee status or Humanitarian Protection in the UK or are an asylum seeker

The University defines a refugee as someone whose claim for asylum has been recognised and they have been granted official ‘refugee’ status. You will also be eligible under this criterion if you have been granted humanitarian protection which has resulted in permission to stay in the UK for humanitarian reasons. An asylum seeker is defined as someone who is in the process of seeking asylum, or the decision is still pending. Asylum seekers are also eligible for the course, but are advised to consider their fee status for further study.

You will need to provide evidence of your eligibility under this criterion. This could include official documentation reflecting your (or your parent(s)/carer(s)) limited or indefinite leave to remain such as a copy of a Biometric Residence Permit (previously Immigration Status Document).

Additional guidelines for refugees or asylum seekers in assessing their eligibility under other categories are available in a short guide available on our website.

You became estranged from close family members (e.g. parents/carers) whilst in secondary education

Estrangement means that you were completing all or part of your secondary education without the support of a family network. This is typically understood as having had no contact at all with your parent(s)/carer(s) for at least 12 months and that this is unlikely to change. You would likely be assessed as an independent student by student finance bodies because of this.

You would not qualify under this criterion if you live separately from your parents but communicate with them. You also would not qualify if have recently fallen out with them, or your parents do not support your decision to study at university. These are challenging circumstances but are not classed as estrangement.
We will not ask you to provide evidence to verify this claim as we appreciate that social service interventions due to estrangement are not common and your school/college may also be unaware of your circumstances. However, if your school or a social worker is aware of your situation, we would appreciate a letter from them reflecting this. If you can’t provide this, we will ask you to complete a short description of the situation, although detail on the reasons for the breakdown of the relationship is not necessary.

You moved state schools two or more times whilst in secondary education

If you have moved state schools two or more times whilst in secondary education, you would meet this criterion. You do not need to provide us with your reasons for moving school/college, but this could be because you have moved home regularly because you were the dependent of someone serving in the armed forces, were in care, or because you are from a traveller background. You may also have experienced issues during your time in previous schools.

If you have left education already and are applying as a mature student, you will not need to provide evidence for this criterion although we would welcome it if you can supply it. If you are still in education, to help us verify your eligibility under this criterion, you should ask your current school/college to provide a letter detailing when you started with them and their understanding of where you were previously educated. Other forms of evidence, such as copies of school reports from different schools, would also be acceptable evidence.

You have been delayed in completing qualifications because you were working while studying part-time

This criterion specifically looks at those who have been delayed completing their qualifications because they been working simultaneously. As such, studying full-time and having a part-time job does not make you eligible. To be eligible, you will have been studying part-time while working, or have completed full-time courses over a longer period due to delays.

To verify your eligibility under this criterion, we ask that you provide us with a P60 for your job(s) in the year that you completed your qualification. If you are still studying, your most recent P60 will suffice.

You experienced a gap of more than one year (for example leaving school at 16 but returning to complete Level 3 qualifications after several years of work)

To verify your eligibility under this criterion, we ask that you upload the transcript from your qualifications to show the year in which they were attained. A transcript is the record of your
academic achievement. If you do not have one, you can request a certified statement of results from the exam board responsible for the qualification(s) you took.

*Your school/college does not offer the subject in A Level or equivalent qualification that you require for entry to Cambridge*

You will qualify under this criterion if your school/college was unable to offer a qualification you would require for entry to Cambridge for the degree courses in scope for progression from the Foundation Year. This includes being unable to take appropriate qualifications in English Literature, Modern Languages, Music, Latin and Classical Greek.

If you attend a school/college in England, we can verify this using data from the Department for Education but you will still need to give us details of the qualification you wanted to study in the form so we can cross-reference it. If you attend a school/college in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, we ask that you upload a letter from your school/college that mentions the subject you weren’t able to study.

*Late diagnosis of Special Educational Needs*

You will be eligible under this criterion if you have been diagnosed with Special Educational Needs in the past two years as of the final application deadline. This includes but is not limited to dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism or mental health difficulties.

If you have Special Educational Needs but these were diagnosed more than two years ago, you will not qualify under this criterion as we are looking for those who were unable to access the support they needed earlier in their education.

To verify your eligibility under this criterion, we ask that you attach a letter from your school. This could come from your SEN Coordinator or anyone else. Alternatively, you could attach a copy of your Educational, Health and Social Care Plan (ECHP). If this will not be possible, a letter from your GP would also be appropriate evidence.

**Category 2: Family Characteristics**

The criteria in this category relates to your family background and are primarily based on income measures.
You are currently eligible for Free School Meals

Free School Meals are available for anyone attending a state school/college aged under 19 whose parent(s)/carer(s) receive certain benefits. As such, we can use it as a proxy for your household income. You will qualify under this criterion if you are currently eligible for Free School Meals, even if you are not currently claiming them. Free School Meals are available in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, but you should check the guidance where you live as there may be minor differences in eligibility. If you are unsure if you qualify, you should ask your school/college.

To verify your eligibility for Free School Meals, we ask that you attach a letter from your school/college. If that can’t be provided, evidence of the benefits you or your family receive that would make your eligible would suffice.

You have been eligible for Free School Meals at any point in the previous 6 years

See above for a description of Free School Meals.

You will qualify under this criterion if you have been eligible for Free School Meals in the past six years as of the final application deadline. For example, you might have been eligible for some time earlier in your school career but as your parent(s)/carer(s) no longer receive the benefits that made you eligible, you are no longer able to receive Free School Meals.

To verify your previous eligibility we ask that you attach a letter from your school/college. If that can’t be provided, evidence of the benefits you or your family received that made you eligible would suffice.

You have a combined household income of £25,000 or less

Your household income includes your income as well as your parent(s)/carer(s) income if you are under 25 and live with them or depend on them financially. If you live in the same household or depend on the partner of one of your parents, their income is also included. If you are over 25 and live with a partner or spouse, your partner’s income is included in your household income.

To verify your eligibility under this criterion, you will need to attach a copy of documentation that shows the income of relevant members of your household. A P60 from the last tax year would be ideal, but other documentation could suffice.

You or your parent(s)/carer(s) are eligible for Universal Credit
Universal Credit is a payment for people over 18 and under State Pension age who are on a low income or out of work. It is available in all parts of the UK. This will be your own status if you live independently or are over 25 and will relate to your parent(s)/carer(s) if you are under 25 and live with them or depend on them financially.

To verify your eligibility under this criterion, you will need to attach a copy of documentation that proves your parent(s)/carer(s) eligibility. A proof of benefits letter or similar documentation would be ideal. This can be obtained through your online account or by contacting your benefits office.

**Category 3: School/College Characteristics**

The criteria in this category refers to the school/college that you attend. The criteria listed applies only to secondary education.

*A school or college you attended has performed poorly in an inspection in the past four years*

All state schools/colleges in the UK are inspected regularly and rated on a scale based on their overall performance. You will be eligible under this criterion if you have attended a school or college that has performed poorly in an inspection in the past four years (as of the last possible date for applications to the programme). This applies to all the secondary schools/colleges you have attended in the past four years. For example, you might have completed your GCSEs at one school and moved elsewhere for sixth form and you should check the recent inspection rating for both these schools.

Different government bodies are responsible for inspections in different parts of the UK, and they use slightly different scales.

- For schools/colleges in Wales, you can check your inspection report at [https://www.estyn.gov.wales](https://www.estyn.gov.wales). To qualify, your school/college would be rated ‘Adequate and needs improvement’ or ‘Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement’.
- For schools/colleges in Scotland, you can check your inspection report at [https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/inspection-reports](https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/inspection-reports). To qualify, your school/college would be rated ‘Weak’ or ‘Unsatisfactory’.
- For schools/colleges in Northern Ireland, you can check your inspection report at [https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/type/inspectionreports](https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/type/inspectionreports). To qualify, your school/college would be rated ‘Inadequate’ or ‘Unsatisfactory’.

Independent school inspections may be available from government bodies, or have been conducted by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. The report is usually available on the school website.
You are eligible under this criterion for ratings received while you were at the school (in the past four years), even if you have since moved schools or left. You are also eligible even if your school has subsequently improved its rating in the past four years. However, you are not eligible under this criterion if you attend a school that had a lower rating within the last four years but you joined after it improved its rating.

This information may not be available for new schools or schools that have closed or merged. We recommend trying to search by postcode. If in doubt, you can contact us at foundation.year@admin.cam.ac.uk for support.

We will independently verify your eligibility using the sources listed above so there is no requirement to upload additional documentation.

You have attended a school or college with below-average attainment

Attaining below average attainment means that examination results at your school or college are lower than the national average. This applies to all the secondary schools/colleges you have attended. For example, you might have completed your GCSEs at one school and moved elsewhere for sixth form- for this you should check the average at both schools.

- For schools/colleges in England, we will use the Attainment 8 measure. This is a score based on how well pupils perform in up to 9 qualifications. You can check if your school/college has a below-average Attainment 8 score at the Compare School Performance Service from the UK Government. Input your school name or postcode to find the record. On the page for your school/college, scroll down to find the Attainment 8 score listing. You should compare the school score (pink bar) to the England average (pale grey bar). To qualify, your school Attainment 8 score must be below the England average.

- For schools/colleges in Wales, we will use two measures: Capped 9 points score and Average points score. You can check if your school/college has a below-average points score at KS4 or Sixth Form using the My Local School Service from the Welsh Government. You should find your school using the school postcode. On the school profile, use the ‘Attainment’ tab to check the ‘Capped 9 points score’ at KS4 and the ‘Average Points score’ at sixth form. You can compare the ‘School – Total’ to the ‘Wales – Total’. To qualify, your school Capped 9 points score (KS4) or Average Points score (sixth form) must be below the Wales average.

- For schools/colleges in Scotland, you can check if your school/college has a below-average school leavers’ average total tariff score. You can find this on the School Information Dashboard from the Scottish Government. You should navigate to the third tab from the left, then select your local authority and your school in the drop-down menus at the top of the tab. The data you need is at the bottom right of the four charts on this page, titled ‘School leavers’ average total tariff score’. You should compare your school figures in the light blue
column to the national average (not to the virtual comparator column in the dark blue). The national average is currently 151 for the lowest 20%, 821 for the middle 20% and 1829 for the highest 20%. To qualify, your school will score below the national average on any of these measures.

This information may not be available for new schools, schools that have closed or merged, or sixth form colleges. Unfortunately, this data is not published for schools/colleges in Northern Ireland.

We will independently verify your eligibility using the sources listed above so there is no requirement to upload additional documentation.

You currently attend a school or college with a below-average progression to Higher Education, to Russell Group universities or to Oxford or Cambridge

This information may not be available for new schools, schools that have closed or merged, or sixth form colleges. Unfortunately, this data is not published for schools/colleges in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

For schools/colleges in England, you can check if your school/college has a below-average progression rate at the Compare School Performance Service from the UK Government. Input your school name or postcode to find the record. On the page for your school/college, navigate to the ‘16-18’ tab, then to ‘Student destinations’. On this next page, select ‘Progression into higher education or training’ and then ‘Breakdown of destinations’. To qualify your school/college average for ‘Degrees’ or ‘Of which Russell Group institutions’ must be below the average for England. Alternatively, the average ‘Of which Oxford or Cambridge’ could be less than or equal to the national average.
## Summary Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Evidence required</th>
<th>Type of evidence suggested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Care-experienced</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Letter from Local Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>You have experienced medical/health issues that have resulted in long or extended periods of absence (over 8 weeks) from school/college whilst in secondary education</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>GP/medical professional letter or school/college letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>You have experienced bereavement due to the death of a close family member whilst in secondary education (for example your parent/carer)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Death certificate, funeral programme/order of service or newspaper death notice</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>You have been a young carer while in education</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>You have become a parent while in education</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Birth certificate</td>
</tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>You experienced a gap of more than one year (for example leaving school at 16 but returning to complete Level 3 qualifications after several years of work)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Qualifications transcript</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Your school/college does not offer the subject in A Level or equivalent qualification that you require for entry to Cambridge</td>
<td>Yes (if not in England)</td>
<td>Letter from school/college</td>
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<td>Late diagnosis of Special Educational Needs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Letter from school/college or EHCP or GP/medical professional letter</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Document Evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>You are currently eligible for Free School Meals</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Letter from school/college</td>
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<td>You have been eligible for Free School Meals at any point in the previous 6 years</td>
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<td>Letter from school/college</td>
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<td>You have a combined household income of £25,000 or less</td>
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<td>P60</td>
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<td>You or your parent(s)/carer(s) are eligible for Universal Credit</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>A school or college you attended has performed poorly in an inspection in the past four years</td>
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<td></td>
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