

Guidance for Mature applicants to the Cambridge Foundation Year

2026/27 Entry

Overview

The purpose of this document is to provide support to those applying as mature students to the Cambridge Foundation Year. The application process, eligibility criteria and academic entry requirements are the same for all students, but this document outlines some guidance specific to mature students applying to the Cambridge Foundation Year.

Further information on the Cambridge Foundation Year programme is available at www.cam.ac.uk/foundationyear

This is a full-time programme and there are requirements for students to be resident in Cambridge during term time.

More information and support about life as a mature student at Cambridge is available at <http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/why-cambridge/support/mature-students>

Am I a Mature student?

If you'll be aged 21 or over by 1 October in the year in which you hope to come to Cambridge you'll be applying as a mature student.

This relates to the age you will be when you start the Foundation Year at Cambridge, not the age you would be on starting any subsequent degree course at Cambridge following the Foundation Year.

Foundation Year Eligibility Criteria

Verifying eligibility is an important part of ensuring that the programme can support the students it has been designed for.

To be considered for the programme, all applicants should meet **one or more criteria** from **at least two of the categories** detailed on our website (unless you are **care-experienced or a refugee or asylum seeker**) and will ordinarily be resident in the UK.

You will be asked to provide evidence of your eligibility as part of the application process. Full details on this are available at www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/courses/foundation-year#eligibility. However, we appreciate that evidencing some of the criteria can be challenging if, for example, you left school some time ago.

If you have any queries, contact foundation.year@admin.cam.ac.uk for guidance.

Category 1: Household Characteristics

In this category, not all the criteria will apply. You will not qualify as being currently eligible for Free School Meals as you are over 19.

If you did qualify for Free School Meals at any point in the past six years, you would qualify under that criterion even if you have now left school/college. We appreciate that you might not be able to get a letter from your previous school/college about your receipt of Free School Meals, but we can accept evidence of the benefits your household received that made you eligible within the past six years.

Under the household income criterion (£25,000 or less) and the eligibility for Universal Credit criteria, there are slightly different rules depending on whether you are under 25 and live with your parent(s)/carer(s) and depend on them financially, are under 25 but independent, or over 25. Guidance on this is available in the eligibility guidance document available on our website.

You will want to check carefully what kind of evidence you will need to provide.

Category 2: School/College Characteristics

In this category, some limitations may apply to mature applicants. This category is generally less likely to be applicable to you if you left education some time ago. If you have returned to education more recently, the criteria can apply to your current state school/college. In some circumstances, they may apply to your previous school/college.

You will qualify under the school attainment measure for any school/college you currently attend, or we will consider those that you have attended in the past 10 years. This is because the measure is currently not applicable to post-16 institutions.

You will qualify under the criteria related to numbers of students remaining in education and the number of offers made for undergraduate courses at Cambridge either for the school/college you attend currently, or for school/colleges you left within the last four years.

Category 3: Individual Characteristics

In this category, there are no additional recommendations for mature applicants. The criteria still apply even if it has been some time since you left education. For example, you might have been a young carer while in education previously, even though you are now aged over 18.

You should read the full guidelines available on our website to ensure you fully understand all the criteria. For example, candidates might misunderstand that the criteria for bereavement of a close family member specifically relates to 'while in secondary education'.

Some criteria are likely to apply specifically to those who are applying as mature students. For example, those who have returned to study after a break meet the criterion 'You experienced a gap of more than one year in your secondary education'. Those who have been working while studying part-time may meet the criterion 'You have been delayed in completing qualifications because you were working while studying part-time'.

You will also want to check carefully what kind of evidence you might need to provide as you may need to locate or acquire the necessary documentation.

Academic Entry Requirements

The academic entry requirement of 120 UCAS Points is the same for all applicants. As a mature applicant, you may:

- Have already obtained the 120 UCAS Points through qualifications you have completed in the past;
- Be working either full-time or part-time towards 120 UCAS Points through any of the suitable qualifications listed on our website;
- Have obtained some qualifications that would count towards 120 UCAS Points in the past, but have recently returned to education and been working on other qualifications.

If you left education some time ago, we would expect to see evidence of recent study to demonstrate your ability to cope with the demands of the course. We recommend some recent studies within the last two years (as of the application deadline). This does not have to be A Levels or an Access to HE course (or equivalent) if you have already completed Level 3 qualifications, but online or face-to-face classes with a lifelong learning department at your local university, the [University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education](#), or modules with the Open University would be ideal. MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) would not be sufficient evidence alone.

If undertaking further study at a Higher Education level, you should carefully consider your eligibility for Student Finance. Some study options can use up SFE eligibility. [Find out more here.](#)

UCAS Reference

As part of your UCAS application, you need to secure a reference. If you're attending a school/college and applying through them, this is usually completed by your institution. However, if you are a mature applicant who is not currently in education, this can be challenging. We do need to receive a reference for all candidates and not supplying one with your UCAS application could cause your application to be removed from the process.

If you are studying for a one-year qualification, such as an Access to HE Diploma, your referee should mention the course and provide as much information as possible about assessment procedures, the grading system, and reflect on your performance so far.

If you have left education relatively recently, consider approaching someone who taught you before you left to see if they would be willing to write a reference on your behalf. Alternatively, if that isn't possible or you left education a long time ago, if you took our advice on the evidence of the recent study above, you could ask the tutor from that to provide you with a reference.

A professional reference is sometimes appropriate, but often cannot give us all the information we need. If your only option is a professional reference, your referee must be able to comment on your application and potential.

Some mature Colleges at Cambridge request a second academic reference from some applicants when applying for a degree course, but for the Foundation Year, we only require the UCAS reference.

College choice

In applying, you will be asked if you wish to indicate a preference College through the Foundation Year Supplementary Application Questionnaire (FYSAQ).

You are welcome to specify any of the participating Colleges, but you might like to consider if one of the participating 'mature' Colleges might be a good fit for your needs. In these Colleges, [Hughes Hall](#), [St Edmund's](#) and [Wolfson](#), you will be living alongside other students who aren't straight out of school. This can be a support for anyone returning to education, and the social life often takes account of partners and families. Watch [this short video](#) to find out more about life at mature Colleges in Cambridge.

If you don't indicate a preference College and instead make an 'Open' application, there is a strong chance that, if successful, your place will be at one of the mature Colleges.

What is the FYSAQ?

The Foundation Year Supplementary Application Questionnaire (FYSAQ) is an additional form you will need to fill in after you apply through UCAS. You can find out more at www.foundationyear.cam.ac.uk/fysaq

Further support

Further information and support on applying to Cambridge as a mature student is available:

- Visit the University's website for information on [mature students at Cambridge](#). There is also [advice for student parents on childcare](#).
- [Advice is available from UCAS](#) on applying to university as a mature student;
- Join our mailing list for application support and free webinars at www.foundationyear.cam.ac.uk/prospective-students/applicant-newsletter

We are on hand to answer any further queries and support applications for the Foundation Year. To best support you, please make enquiries in good time. You can reach us at foundation.year@admin.cam.ac.uk

Details are correct at the time of publication (July 2025) but should be checked against the Undergraduate Study website for the most up-to-date information. © University of Cambridge, 2025.