

# ATAS Guide: Frequently Asked Questions

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## About ATAS

The Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) applies to all international students and researchers (apart from exempt nationalities) who are subject to UK immigration control and are intending to study or research at postgraduate level in certain sensitive subjects. You do not need an ATAS certificate if you're doing a postgraduate diploma or PGCE. Dual nationals who hold one of the listed nationalities will also be exempt. This is not based on place of residence, but nationality only. The ATAS requirement does not apply to applicants who are listed as exempt in Appendix ATAS of the [Immigration Rules](#).

Students and researchers who are nationals of UK, EU countries, the European Economic Area (EEA), Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, or the United States of America do not need to apply as they are listed as exempt.

Only courses in certain sensitive subject areas at postgraduate level or above require ATAS clearance. Prospective students should read the guidance for their course and offer letter to find out if they require an ATAS certificate.

Before starting your application for ATAS, please ensure that you read the [FCDO ATAS guidance](#) before starting an application. Failure to answer any of the questions correctly in your application, may lead to further delay in processing time.

When you begin your ATAS application, please ensure you use your full name (exactly as shown in your passport) and select the correct institution for your studies e.g. University of Birmingham. Your ATAS certificate must be linked to the University to be able to use this as part of a visa application to study here.

The ATAS requirement doesn't only apply to the Student Route (previously named Tier 4) visa. You may also need ATAS if you are going to study your course using other time-limited visa such as on a dependant visa, a work visa, and a Standard Visitor visa. In these cases, ATAS is a condition of entry to a course, which means you do not necessarily need the ATAS certificate to apply for the visa, but you will need the ATAS certificate to start your studies.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### When should I apply for ATAS?

If you are a continuing student in the U.K, we recommend to submit an ATAS application at least 4 months before your visa expires. The ATAS certificate is valid for six months which would give you plenty of time to prepare for your visa application. The normal waiting time for an application is 20 working days but this can be much longer during peak times. If you are returning from a Leave of Absence and your course requires a valid ATAS certificate, we advise you to apply at least 4 months in advance of your return date.

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If you are a prospective student, when you have received your offer from your university you should apply 6 months before your course will start. An ATAS certificate is valid for 6 months from the date it is issued, to enable applicants time to apply for their visa.

### How much will the ATAS application cost?

An ATAS application is free. There is no application fee.

### What should I do if my ATAS application has been unsuccessful?

If you have received a decision from the ATAS Team that you have been unsuccessful you will need to forward this information to your Admissions or your School to make them aware. You can contact the IST for guidance if it has been unsuccessful but for the vast majority of cases, the decision cannot be successfully challenged. If you think your application has been treated unfairly you can ask the FCDO to review your case, but in our experience the review application success rate is low.

### Will someone tell me when I need to apply for my ATAS?

If you are a continuing student, you should make a note of when your permission to enter the UK is due to expire, to allow sufficient time to complete your ATAS and permission to stay applications before your current permission expires. We recommend you apply at least 4 months before your current visa permission expires.

If you are a prospective student, you will be advised to apply on receipt of your university offer, as early as possible to ensure there are no delays for you.

### How long will it take for me to get ATAS clearance?

ATAS applications take at least 20 working days (4 full weeks) to process. If you apply between April and September, it can take at least 30 working days to complete. To ensure fairness and consistency, the FCDO process ATAS applications in order of receipt. There is no 'fast track' service. You should submit your ATAS application as early as possible.

### How does my dual nationality affect the ATAS requirement?

If you have dual nationality, decide which passport you will use to apply for your visa/enter the UK, and then select this option as your main nationality.

Dual nationals who apply with a listed exempt nationality, will be exempt from having to meet the ATAS requirement. You will need to check if your nationalities are on the exempt nationality list on the [\(FCDO\) ATAS website](#). The requirement is not based on place of residence, but your nationality only. Enter details of your second nationality – in other words, not the nationality of the passport you will be using to apply for your visa and enter the UK – for the relevant dual nationality question.

Please note, your CAS and ATAS certificate should reflect your (exempt) nationality and you must include both nationalities in both your ATAS and visa applications.

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Please contact the IST where you hold dual nationality so we can assess this requirement for you and advise further.

### What happens if more information is needed for my ATAS to be processed?

Following your ATAS application being considered, the ATAS Team may require further information from you. The ATAS Team will email you requesting for you to log in to your application and to update certain sections and ask you to re-submit this. If this is the case, the processing time will be longer due to re-submitting.

### What should I do if I have not received a decision within the estimated decision time stated by the FCDO?

ATAS applications take at least 20 working days (4 full weeks) to process. If you apply between April and September, it can take at least 30 working days to complete. If you are a continuing student, then you may decide to send a follow-up email to the ATAS team if you have been waiting beyond the minimum waiting time as above. Email [ATAS@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:ATAS@fcdo.gov.uk) with subject line (*URGENT – ATAS reference number*) and include your student details. Please note, during peak time, it is unlikely that the ATAS team will respond to your email and it may have no effect on your application wait time. If you are a new student (not a continuing student), then you may want to ask the Admissions team to email the ATAS team on your behalf.

### How will a late ATAS affect my studies?

For continuing students, if you do not receive a valid ATAS certificate within 10 working days of your current visa expiring, then the IST may not have enough time during our working hours, to complete our full assessment for a new CAS. For new/prospective students, UK immigration law does not allow universities to register/enrol students for a course requiring ATAS, until the ATAS certificate has been issued to the student.

### What is the purpose of ATAS?

The ATAS scheme was introduced by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) in November 2007. to help stop the spread of knowledge and skills that could be used in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and Advanced Conventional Military Technology and the means of delivery for each. The ATAS is specifically designed to make sure that those applying for postgraduate study in certain sensitive subjects do not acquire knowledge that could potentially be used in WMD or Advanced Conventional Military Technology programmes.

## How long is ATAS valid for?

After you receive your ATAS certificate by email, it has an issue and expiry date showing validity of 6 months. Please ensure that you submit your visa application before the ATAS certificate expires. An ATAS clearance certificate is issued for a specific course with a named provider and covers the length of that course from the course start date to the course end date given on the CAS, plus up to an additional 3 calendar months of study. The certificate remains valid as long as the provider and course details remain the same.

## My course duration is longer than 6 months though, what happens when my ATAS expires?

The ATAS certificate only needs to be valid on the 'date of application' for your visa application.

If you have applied for your visa with a valid certificate by date of application, then the certificate does not need to continue to be valid for the full duration of your course. The certificates are issued for 6 months only.

If there are any changes to your course, course end date or university provider, then you may need to apply for a new ATAS certificate to include these changes.

## Help! I haven't received my ATAS clearance before my programme start date. What do I do?

You must contact your School to make them aware to check if there can be arrangements made for you to start your course later, if eligible. You should also contact the ATAS Team with an urgent email to ask for an update on the status of your application. To ensure fairness and consistency the ATAS Team process applications in order of receipt as there is no 'fast track' service. We advise that you should submit your ATAS application as early as possible to prevent any delays.

## I am having problems registering on the ATAS website – what should I do?

If you are having problems registering on the ATAS website, try registering from a different computer (e.g. in a place of work or education) or with an alternative email address.

Try using a different web browser (the ATAS website works best in Google Chrome). You may have trouble using Internet Explorer or Firefox to complete the form.

## If I apply for ATAS clearance, does that mean that I must become a student at the University of Birmingham?

No, for prospective students, you can still change your mind after you receive your ATAS certificate.

I am classed as a low risk national under the ‘differential arrangements’. Does this mean I don’t need ATAS?

The differentiation arrangements do not apply to the ATAS requirement. All applicants who are required to provide an ATAS certificate for their course/research must apply for a clearance certificate as normal and provide this in their evidence for a Student visa application.

I am a British citizen holding a British passport. Do I need to apply for ATAS clearance?

No. If you are a UK national, then you are not subject to UK immigration control and the ATAS requirement doesn’t apply to you.

I am an Irish citizen holding an Irish passport. Do I need to apply for ATAS clearance?

No. Ireland is listed under exempt nationalities as it is in the European Union (EU). The ATAS requirement does not apply to applicants who are listed as exempt in [Appendix ATAS 3.1](#).

I have Indefinite Leave to Remain. Do I still need to apply for ATAS clearance?

If you hold Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) in the UK (no time limit), you do not need an ATAS certificate to study in the UK. You would need to evidence your ILR (settled status) in your visa application.

I am an asylum seeker in the UK, do I require ATAS?

If you are waiting on your asylum claim in the UK, you must apply for an ATAS certificate to study in the UK, if your studies require this.

What if I need to extend my visa because I need extra time to complete my programme of study?

If you are applying for an extension of permission to continue your course, you will need a new ATAS certificate. You must first check that your still course requires ATAS before applying.

What is my CAH (CAH3) code and where can I find it?

All subject areas studied at UK Higher Education Institutions are identified by CAH3 code. The University will provide you with a CAH3 code and normally confirm whether your course or research will require an ATAS certificate. ATAS uses V1.3.4 of the CAH3. You will need to know the CAH code before you can complete an ATAS application. You can only request for

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this through the [Online Shop](#). Please note that your CAH3 code will not be the same as your course code or UCAS code.

### Continuing students

For Undergraduate/Postgraduate Taught: If you are a continuing student, you will need to request this from the [Online Shop](#). Your initial course offer letter should have your course CAH code, however these codes can change so you must always check with your school. You may require ATAS, if you are studying an undergraduate integrated Masters course (e.g. MEng) which leads to a Level 7 Masters degree, if this is in the ATAS sensitive subject areas.

For Postgraduate Research: If you are a continuing student, you will need to request this from the [Online Shop](#). Through this request, you will be given confirmation of whether you require an ATAS certificate. You need to have received your Research Statement before applying for your ATAS application as it contains the relevant information needed along with the CAH code for your course.

### Prospective students or a new course of study

If you are a new student, your offer letter should give you notice if your new course requires an Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS). You will only be assigned a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) for your student visa once you meet the conditions of your offer.

For a programme change: TSA/RSA of Registry should give you notice if your new course requires an Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) and provide you with your Research Statement for making an application.

## Where can I check if I require ATAS?

There is a [FCDO checking tool](#) on the ATAS application website, that tells you whether you [require an ATAS certificate](#). If the information you enter is accurate for your circumstances, then this tool will give you an accurate answer. You will need to select the CAH code for your studies, select your nationality and answer a few questions (see below). Please note, dual nationals who hold one of the listed exempt nationalities will be exempt from ATAS requirement.

Question 1: Should I select 'Taught/Research Student' or 'Researcher'?

As you are a student, you will need to select 'Taught/Research Student'. The 'researcher' option should not be selected if you are a student.

Question 2: 'What type of study are you undertaking?'

You will need to select option of either 'Research' or 'Taught' depending on your course information. If you are applying for a taught course (for example MEng, MSc), you should select 'Taught'. If you are applying for a research course (for example, PhD), you should select 'Research'.

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When can I select option of 'Researcher'?

The 'researcher' option should not be selected if you are a student. If you select this option, you will have a contract of employment as a 'Researcher' within the University of Birmingham. Researchers in this context are individuals that are taking part in research as part of employment at a licensed sponsor.

The ATAS application form does not accept a start date in the past – what date should I use?

If you are a continuing student, then you will need to enter the start date as today or the next day (e.g. tomorrow)

Alternatively, if you are a prospective student applying to start a new course of study this should not present a problem as your start date will always be in the future as you would require ATAS approval to be able to meet your offer conditions.

The application asks for my named Supervisor – how do I find this out?

If you do not know or do not have a named Supervisor, then please contact your School for confirmation of who is the head of your studies or project.

I don't know what modules I'll be studying, help!

This information will be provided by the school once you have chosen your modules. MRes students should check their 'Research Statement'. You should be able to describe the options available on their course and state which options you will choose. MEng and MSci students should also provide information about the modules offered on their course (the final year elective & core modules). MSc students must enter the titles of the optional modules which they think they might choose to study as part of the course. For details of the modules available on your course, please contact your School.

I'm a PhD student but I don't have a statement of research - where can I get this?

**If you are a new student:** This is usually sent with your offer letter. If you don't have this statement, and need an ATAS certificate, please contact your Admissions Officer, listed on your offer letter.

**If you are a continuing student:** You will need to request the [Research Statement from the Online Shop](#) while logged on to the University intranet. PhD students will need to enter the detailed information from the Research Statement about their proposed area of Research to be able to complete a valid ATAS application. This should be about 6-7 lines in length and should have already been agreed with your supervisor in writing or by email.



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### Is my programme a joint programme with another country?

**If your course is mainly the University of Birmingham but includes a year abroad (e.g., an integrated year):** Your degree will should only be awarded by University of Birmingham, and you should answer “No” to the joint programme question.

**If your course divides your main study in two different countries:** You should be already aware if you are on a ‘joint programme’. Your degree will either be jointly awarded by University of Birmingham and another institution or awarded solely by another institution. You should answer “Yes” to the joint programme question.

### What education history do I need to provide?

In the “Undergraduate / Postgraduate studies” section, the form will ask you whether you have “undertaken any undergraduate or postgraduate studies”; this refers only to studies at University Degree level. You are not required to provide information about your previous high school education. If you have not yet completed your course, then you must provide your course details including possible expected completion date and the expected qualification, e.g. Masters / PhD etc.

### How should I complete the ‘Employment’ section - if I have never been employed?

You are required to provide details of employment since you left school that includes paid work and any long-term voluntary (i.e. unpaid) work. You do not need to provide information about temporary jobs you have done during university vacations.

If you have not undertaken any employment as mentioned above, select “No” in this section. If you have been employed, please ensure there are no long gaps in your employment history. If you were unemployed for a long period of time, for example, if you were a full-time parent, please also indicate this on the form.

### Who should I use as referees?

The [ATAS guidance](#) states that you need to provide the:

- Full names and contact details of 2 referees (first name(s) and family name).
- You must have known both of your referees for at least 3 years.
- One of your referees must be an academic.
- One of the referees must be from your home country.
- If you have been studying outside of your home country, then you can use an academic referee that is not from your country of origin (e.g. if you have studied your UG in the UK then you may use a UK academic as a referee).
- Family members are not acceptable as referees.

### What should I do if my referees are not based in my home country?

If you are unable to provide referees from your home country because you have been

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studying elsewhere, this should not be an issue. Please just provide two referees from your most recent studies who have known you for 3 years.

If you are applying for ATAS to start or continue with an undergraduate Masters programme (e.g. MEng / MSc), then you may want to use a high school teacher as a referee to meet the 3-year requirement.

### How should I complete the 'Sponsors' section if I am a self-funding student?

You must provide details of who is going to fund your study. If you are funding your study yourself, please put your own name and address in the relevant boxes. If a family member is funding your study, put down their details.

### I have already obtained ATAS clearance, but my passport details have since changed – what should I do?

If you have been issued a new passport and you do not have time to apply for a new ATAS application, please send a copy of both the old and new passport photo (biodata) pages to the IST and include your ATAS reference and new passport number. We will forward this on to the ATAS team on your behalf once we have received your completed Form of Authority. In most cases they will update your certificate to reflect the new passport details. In some instances, you may be required to apply for a new application. Where you have changed nationality, you will be required to apply for a new ATAS with your new passport.

### I have already obtained ATAS clearance, but I entered the incorrect CAH code – what should I do?

You will need to make a new ATAS application using the correct CAH code. Once you have submitted a new application, please send us a copy of your most recent ATAS certificate together with the ATAS Reference Number (for your new application) - we will then ask the FCDO whether they will be able progress your new application to be placed in the consideration stage more quickly due to the minor error. You must wait until you have your new ATAS certificate before you can receive your CAS or make a visa application.

### Can I apply for my visa before I get ATAS clearance?

No, if your course requires ATAS clearance and you do not hold an exempt nationality then you must submit your ATAS certificate when applying for a Student Route visa. Your Student Route visa application must be refused by UKVI if you do not satisfy the full visa eligibility criteria.

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### How do I know if my ATAS application has been successful?

If your ATAS application is successful, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) will send an ATAS certificate to the email address, that you included in your application.

You should check your spam/junk folders regularly to ensure the email has not been filtered away from your inbox. When you receive your certificate, you should check that the details on it are correct. If everything is correct, print the certificate for your own records. If making a CAS Request for visa extension, you will need to email the certificate (file) to the IST as part of the document assessment. You must include the ATAS certificate in your submitted evidence as part of your visa application.

If there are any mistakes in your certificate, contact the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office immediately at [atas@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:atas@fcdo.gov.uk) with subject line of '*URGENT – (Your ATAS reference number) - Certificate Change*'. Normally, the ATAS Team can correct a very minor mistake and re-issue the certificate.

### I need some further information, or advice regarding ATAS, who do I contact?

For any support or advice regarding immigration or student visas, please do not hesitate to contact the International Student Team (IST) who will be happy to assist you.

### What website should I use to submit an ATAS application?

To submit an application you will need to check you require ATAS and then create an account/sign in and follow the application questions through the following link: [Check if you need an ATAS certificate \(academic-technology-approval.service.gov.uk\)](https://academic-technology-approval.service.gov.uk)

ATAS guidance and the relevant ATAS Immigration Rules:

- [Guidance on how to apply for an ATAS certificate - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-apply-for-an-atas-certificate)
- [Academic Technology Approval Scheme \(ATAS\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academic-technology-approval-scheme-atas)
- [Immigration Rules Appendix ATAS: Academic Technology Approval Scheme \(ATAS\) - Immigration Rules - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules-appendix-atas-academic-technology-approval-scheme-atas-immigration-rules)