

## COVID-19 ASSISTANCE FUND

### GUIDANCE NOTES FOR STUDENTS – 2021/22

The University is committed to assisting students who have faced disadvantage or disruption as a result of COVID-19. The COVID-19 Assistance Fund is a University-wide scheme to support students whose financial situation has been affected by the pandemic. The scheme is being administered by your college in conjunction with their own forms of support. We recognise that disclosing financial issues and sharing challenging circumstances may feel difficult. These guidance notes offer detailed information to help you complete the application and to receive any support and advice you may need in the process of doing so.

#### What is the COVID-19 Assistance Fund?

The COVID-19 Assistance Fund (CAF) is intended to provide grants of up to £5,000 to students whose finances have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic since they began their studies at Oxford. It can thus assist students to complete the final stages of their academic course. Students must be facing exceptional and unexpected financial need which has led to a shortfall in their finances that they are unable to meet through other sources. Applications to the Fund might relate to cancellation of external funding awards; significant loss of financial support from family or a partner; loss of income from changes in employment arrangements; unplanned living costs and continuation charges for those students who need to extend their research programme, or other living or study-related costs for which funding is no longer available. Students who have to meet unexpected accommodation costs due to quarantine rules or self-isolation are also able to apply for assistance, where this has led to a shortfall in their finances. However, please note that students will not normally be eligible to seek support from the CAF upfront to enable them to return to Oxford.

The scheme cannot meet all additional costs arising from COVID-19, only those necessary costs relating to your studies and associated living costs for which students can clearly demonstrate a genuine need. Similarly, the fund is not intended to support students whose situation has become financially unsustainable over the longer term and who would not have adequate funding in place for the remainder of their studies beyond any assistance which might be granted from the CAF (in conjunction with any other support available to them). Students who have identified a funding deficit relating to the next academic year (i.e. 2022/23) or a subsequent year of their course should not proceed with an application to the CAF for the 2021/22 academic year.

#### Who is eligible to apply?

On-course, full- and part-time students of all fee statuses who are studying for a qualification recognised under the Examination Regulations at the University of Oxford are eligible to apply for CAF support unless specifically excluded below.

The following groups are unfortunately not eligible to apply:

1. Research students who have submitted their thesis (and those who are resubmitting).
2. Students who are eligible to apply for a scholarship extension from the COVID-19 Scholarship Extensions Fund (CSEF), unless they have reached the maximum extension available or have been rejected for a CSEF extension and are in financial difficulty. Similarly, where a student is only in receipt of partial scholarship funding, and where this income in conjunction with other sources results in a shortfall in their finances, an application to the CAF may be permitted. For students resident in Oxford, where projected income to cover living costs meets or exceeds the University's lower-range estimate for Oxford living costs, any application to the CAF would be expected to demonstrate a clear need for support beyond the level of funding already in place. For students who are studying remotely, individual circumstances and related living costs will be assessed accordingly.

3. Students who are in financial difficulty whose funding arrangements have not been impacted directly by the COVID-19 pandemic. Such students should apply for financial assistance through the standard routes for support, including the Oxford Hardship Fund as detailed at <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/assistance/hardship>. If you are uncertain which Fund is appropriate to your circumstances, please ask your College Hardship Officer for guidance.

It is expected that students in receipt of external funding (scholarships, government loans, UKRI funding, etc.) will first have explored with their funding body whether any hardship-related support may be available before applying to the CAF.

Students in their first year of study must ensure that they have clearly demonstrated sustainability in their funding arrangements for the remainder of their course, beyond any support granted through the CAF when applying to the CAF.

Students must first pursue any insurance claim or external funding request relating to the COVID-19 pandemic before applying to the CAF, and will be required to demonstrate the level of support already received from other sources to meet exceptional costs. If you have University travel insurance and are unsure whether you are eligible for assistance, please visit the <https://finance.admin.ox.ac.uk/travel-claims-and-emergency-contact> for further details about submitting a claim.

Students who receive support from the CAF will not normally be eligible to be considered for additional funding from the standard University hardship schemes. UK undergraduate students who receive CAF support will remain eligible to apply for Student Support Fund bursaries (those starting in or after 2020) and for Estranged and care-experienced student bursaries if they would normally be entitled to access this support.

#### **What level of funding is available from the COVID-19 Assistance Fund?**

COVID-19 Assistance Fund grants of up to £5,000 are available. Awards will be allocated on a case by case basis, taking into account individual circumstances and need based on a student's overall financial position. Need will be assessed in terms of financial shortfall (that is, insufficient funds to meet necessary expenditure relating to your course and reasonable living costs for the applicable period of study; identifying additional costs or loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic is not on its own sufficient demonstration of need). Awards will only be granted in cases where financial shortfall can be identified relating to the academic year 21/22. The fund is not intended as a source of funding to replace long-term shortfalls or to meet all additional costs arising from the current situation.

#### **How do I apply?**

Applications will be accepted until Friday 3 June 2022 (6<sup>th</sup> week, Trinity term) and your college will provide further information about their assessment process. You can obtain an application form for the COVID-19 Assistance Fund through your College Hardship Officer. The application form contains sections for you to complete regarding your anticipated income and essential expenditure for the 21/22 academic year (please refer to the 'Completing the application form' section below for full details). The form also provides an opportunity for you to explain your current situation and the sustainability of your finances. The CAF application is intended to assist students in setting out their finances clearly so that a thorough assessment of their financial situation can be undertaken as fairly as possible, with the aim of ensuring that available funding can be appropriately targeted.

Completed applications and any supporting documentation should be submitted to your College Hardship Officer, as directed by them. Applications will only be processed when all components have been received.

You may also be required to provide further information relating to your application following an initial review.

### **How will my application be assessed?**

Applications will be assessed by College Hardship Officers and other college officers supporting this process. Decisions will take into account your current situation, including the need you have described, your overall financial position, and the amount you have requested, as well as the demands on the fund. The basis for a CAF award is as follows:

- your finances have been clearly impacted by COVID-19 specifically
- a financial shortfall can be identified
- you have demonstrated that you have first explored all other forms of funding, and accessed these where applicable
- you have projected reasonable living costs for your circumstances
- you have requested an appropriate level of assistance for your situation
- the sustainability of your finances can be established

This is to ensure all students are assessed fairly and to assist as many students in exceptional financial need as possible through the provision of COVID-19 Assistance Fund grants.

For self-funded or partially-funded PGR students whose studies have been extended and who are applying for support in meeting additional living costs and continuation charges, the college may consult with your department to confirm additional information regarding the progress of your studies. This will assist your college in verifying whether funding requested through CAF will be sufficient to enable you to submit within your revised timeframe.

Applications will be treated in the strictest confidence subject to the University's GDPR Policy as detailed in the application form declaration page and subject to your college's GDPR policy.

### **What costs are included in the CAF assessment?**

The University and colleges recognise that students may be facing a range of unexpected costs and changes in income as a result of the pandemic, and that there may also be other factors which have compounded a student's financial difficulties, but which are not directly attributable to the impact of COVID-19. This might include unexpected increases in accommodation costs, study-related costs or personal costs. Students who have to meet unexpected accommodation costs due to quarantine rules or self-isolation are also able to apply for assistance, where this has led to a shortfall in their finances.

Students are advised to complete the income and expenditure sections as comprehensively as possible in order to enable a full assessment of your financial situation to be carried out. This is to ensure that the support that you receive is based on your essential expenditure and expected income; students should be reassured that no judgements are being made on the types of costs incurred. If you are experiencing underlying financial difficulties which may pre-date the pandemic or be related to other factors, then you should discuss with your College Hardship Officer whether an application to the Oxford Hardship Fund may be more appropriate before proceeding with a CAF application.

### **What supporting documentation do I need to provide?**

You will be required to provide electronic copies of documentation confirming your accommodation costs (where you are not living in college accommodation), and provide any available evidence of additional costs incurred as result of the pandemic, as well as any documentation relating to the outcome of your insurance claim or other funding request, where available and applicable. Following an initial review of your application, your college will advise you whether they wish to verify any information relating to your stated

bank account balances or your stated sources of funding, which may require you to provide supplementary documentation. Further information is provided in the supporting documentation checklist at the end of the CAF application form.

**How will I be notified of the outcome of my application?**

Your College Hardship Officer will inform you of the outcome of your application and any associated payment arrangements.

**Can I submit a repeat application?**

Students who were unsuccessful or received only a partial CAF award in relation to the amount requested will not normally be eligible to reapply to the CAF, except in cases of material changes in their financial situation. Students experiencing a change in their circumstances should first seek advice from their College Hardship Officer on how to proceed.

**Who can I contact for assistance with completing my application form?**

Please contact your College Hardship Officer directly if you have any queries or require further clarification before finalising and submitting your application form.

## COMPLETING YOUR APPLICATION FORM

### **Section 1: Personal details**

Your student number can be found via your Student Self Service account (<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students>) Please note that this is different from the barcode number on your University Card.

### **Section 2: Course details**

Please select your mode of study and indicate the duration of the academic year that is applicable to your course. For example, continuing-year DPhil students should select 12 months, whilst undergraduates should select 9 months unless on a course with extended terms in 2021/22. If you are a postgraduate research student who is shortly due to submit their thesis, please confirm the number of months remaining until submission.

If you are a PGR student, please indicate the reason for your CAF application. If you are incurring additional costs due to an extension to your studies and are also in COVID-19 related financial difficulty, please select the second option.

### **Section 3: Previous awards**

Please indicate whether you have previously applied for or received financial assistance from the central University through the schemes listed on the application form and provide additional details accordingly. This will assist your college in reviewing your previous funding plans and subsequent outcomes accordingly when building up a full picture of your financial situation. Further information can be found at <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/assistance/hardship>.

### **Sections 4A and 4B: Course fees/continuation charges and sources of funding**

Please complete this section as clearly and comprehensively as possible to ensure a complete picture of your finances can be established. Only research students who have reached the end of their course fee liability are required to pay continuation charges. If you are unsure of the course fee payable for 21/22, please visit <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/search> to check the fees for the current year of your course. Details of University continuation charges for 21/22 can be found at <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/fees/liability/graduate-continuation-charge> and your College will be able to provide further guidance on college continuation charges.

### **Section 5: Living costs sources of funding**

Please complete this section as clearly and comprehensively as possible to ensure a complete picture of your finances can be established. You should note that the table is divided into two parts: one for confirmed sources of income that are secure; and the other for planned sources of income that are not yet secure. Please add up all the amounts you have listed to arrive at the total expected income and include this figure at the end of the section.

### **Section 6: Bank balances and savings**

For all current and savings accounts that are held or jointly held in your name, please confirm the balance as at **30 September 2021 and current balance**. This will be used to determine the level of personal funding available to you to fund your studies at the start of the 2021/22 academic year. Failure to declare any other current or savings accounts could be interpreted as an attempt to deceive the University and will be referred to the Office of the Proctors and Assessor. You may be required to provide official bank/building society statements showing the balance as at 30 September 2021 and the current balance, if requested by your college. Your college will notify you whether you are required to do so after an initial review of your application.

### **Section 7: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on your finances**

Please explain any loss of income or additional costs you are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including continuation charges, where your studies have been delayed, and information on the likelihood of any affected sources of funding resuming. Where a partner or supporting family member has experienced a change in income please explain how this has affected the funding available for your studies. Where there are other factors which have compounded your financial difficulties, but which are not directly attributable to the impact of COVID-19, there will be an opportunity to include these in your supporting statement in section 11. The changes in finances relating to these other factors should not be included in section 7 as this is intended solely to assess the impact of COVID-19 on your financial situation.

### **Section 8: Living costs expenditure**

Please provide an estimate of your total expenditure on living costs for each of the categories listed. This should relate to the duration of the academic year 21/22 that corresponds to your course, as indicated in section 2. Further details about the University's living costs ranges can be found at <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/living-costs>.

If you are studying with dependants, and have incurred unexpected costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to support them, please include these in this section.

If you have a disability and have incurred additional study costs arising due to the COVID-19 pandemic, please include these in this section.

If you have incurred additional travel costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic beyond your original budgeted amount for travel to and from Oxford, please include these in this section.

### **Section 9: COVID-19 Assistance Fund request**

Please provide an estimate of the minimum amount of COVID-19 assistance funding that you believe you would require for the remainder of the 2021/22 academic year. This should take into account the difference between the total expected income you have declared in section 5 and the total expected expenditure in section 8 for the 2021/22 academic year. A resulting shortfall in your finances needs to be identifiable to be eligible for CAF support.

### **Section 10: Status of other assistance requested**

Please include details of any funding request or insurance claim for assistance with costs relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, and confirm the level of support provided towards meeting these costs, so that this can be taken into account when assessing your finances.

### **Section 11: Supporting statement**

Please ensure you complete each question in this section carefully to ensure your financial situation can be fully assessed. You should refer back to the information you have included in other sections of your application as prompted to support your request for assistance. At this end of this section, there is an opportunity to include any additional information that you feel is relevant to your application that you wish to make your college aware of. This may include noting other factors which have compounded your financial difficulties, but which are not directly attributable to the impact of COVID-19.

### **Declarations**

Please read the statements on confidentiality and data protection. The declaration can be signed electronically/your name printed in the signature box upon submission of the application, provided your application is submitted from a University of Oxford email address.

### **Supporting documents**

It is important that the requested supporting documentation is included when submitting your form as otherwise the processing of your application may be delayed. Please refer to the supporting document checklist to help you to ensure you have supplied all the necessary evidence.

## **WADHAM COLLEGE GUIDANCE NOTES**

### **How do I submit my CAF application and any supporting documentation?**

Please upload your application materials to the college using the following secure SharePoint link:

[\*COVID-19 Assistance application upload\*](#)

### **How will my CAF application be assessed in college?**

Depending on the volume of applications, these will be assessed by committee on a weekly or fortnightly basis. You will be emailed regarding the result as soon as it is available.

### **Do I need to submit a separate application in order to be considered for college funding?**

We use one and the same form for the Oxford Hardship Fund and the College Student Support Fund. If you wish to apply for the COVID-19 Hardship fund and College Student Support in parallel, you need to submit forms for both.

### **When will I hear about the outcome of my CAF application?**

Depending on the volume of applications, you can expect to receive the outcome within a couple of weeks.

### **If my application is successful, how will my CAF award be disbursed?**

If your application is successful, you will be asked to provide your bank details to the Accounts Department. The award will be disbursed via online transfer.

### **How can I appeal the outcome of my CAF application?**

Please email [student.funding@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.funding@admin.ox.ac.uk), giving your reasons for wishing to appeal the outcome.

### **Who can I contact for assistance in completing the CAF application form?**

Please contact the Finance Bursar's PA at [katarina.bjurstedt@wadham.ox.ac.uk](mailto:katarina.bjurstedt@wadham.ox.ac.uk).