What is the Doctorate Extension Scheme?

The Doctorate Extension Scheme (DES) enables Tier 4 students who complete a PhD at a UK institution to extend their visa in order to have more time to find work with a Tier 2 employer, set up as an entrepreneur or gain work experience in their field.

To apply under the scheme you will need to be sponsored by the University and issued a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) to support a new Tier 4 visa application before you complete your PhD. The DES visa will be granted for a period of 12 months from the expected completion date stated on the new CAS.

What are the working conditions under DES?

On DES you can work full-time with the only restriction being that you cannot work as a Doctor or Dentist in training or a sportsperson (including coaches). On a Tier 4 visa issued for studies you cannot work in a permanent position or be self-employed but on DES these restrictions no longer apply.

The less restrictive employment terms under DES apply from the date of PhD completion (providing a valid visa application for DES has been made before this date), even if the applicant is awaiting the outcome of their visa application at this time.

Who can apply?

To be eligible for the scheme you must:

- Hold a valid Tier 4 (General) visa for PhD studies at Cambridge at the point you will be applying for DES;
- Be able to apply for the visa from within the UK;
- Complete a University declaration and make a £50 payment;
- Receive a CAS, and make the visa application prior to receiving final approval for your degree;
- Meet all other requirements of the Tier 4 application, including financial.

How do I start the process for DES?

If you wish to apply for this visa, complete an Expression of Interest form and email it to the International Student Office after you have submitted your softbound thesis for examination. The International Student Office will record your interest and ask you to keep them updated with the progress towards the completion of your PhD.

In order to apply for DES, you will need to agree an expected course end date for your CAS. This will be the date it is expected the University will unconditionally approve your PhD and for most students will the day they submit their hardbound thesis, after the Degree Committee and Board of Graduate Studies have approved the viva outcome and any corrections have been completed.
Where the completion date on your CAS is the submission of your hardbound thesis, you will need to submit the physical copy to Student Registry and upload an electronic version to the University repository.

**What do I need for my Tier 4 visa application?**

The Doctorate Extension Scheme requires you to submit a new Tier 4 visa application before you complete your PhD. This application process is similar to the process for extending your Tier 4 visa from inside the UK. Once you have been sent your CAS by email you will be able to make your application. You will need to enter your CAS reference number in the relevant section of the visa application form. You do not need to submit a printout of your CAS with the application.

For the application you will need to provide the following supporting documents:

- Current passport and visa
- 2 passport sized-colour photographs with your name written on the back.
- Bank statements as proof of your finances for maintenance (living costs). You will need to have held £2030 for a minimum consecutive 28 day period, ending no more than one month before you apply for the visa.
- Police registration certificate (if applicable); you will only need to send this with your visa application if your current visa requires you to have a Police Registration Certificate.
- Letter of consent from official financial sponsor: You will need this if you have received official financial sponsorship from a government or international scholarship agency within the past 12 months. You will not need to provide this letter if you have received funding from the University, your College, the Cambridge Trust or Gates Cambridge.

In addition to the visa application fee, you will need to make a payment of £150 for the immigration healthcare surcharge as part of your visa application.

If you are studying a PhD in a science and technology related subject area you may have needed ATAS clearance. You are not required to submit an updated ATAS certificate as part of your application for DES. However if the course end date given on your CAS issued for your PhD studies is postponed for a period of more than three calendar months, you must apply for a new ATAS clearance certificate to cover the remaining period of time on your course.

Please note that the provision of a CAS is not confirmation that PhD approval will be granted and plays no role in the approval process; a CAS can be withdrawn if a PhD is not awarded.

**How much does it cost to apply?**

There are three application services available, all of which require you to submit an online Tier 4 application first:

- Standard service which takes up to 8 weeks for a decision. You need to send your supporting documents to UKVI once you have made your online application.
- Priority service which takes up to 10 days for a decision. This service requires you to complete a priority request form and be allocated a slot before completing the online application. You will then need to send your supporting documents to UKVI.
- Premium service where you attend an in-person appointment at a Premium Service Centre and a decision is made on the day.

Please note that the advertised service timeframes are for the decision to be made on the application. You will be issued a Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) as evidence of your new immigration status and this will act as your new visa. It can take around 1 week to be sent to you after a decision has been made on your application.

If you have travel plans, you should note that you will not be able to leave the UK during the visa application process. You will need to wait until you have received your new BRP before travelling as you will be required to show this at passport control when you return to the UK.

Further information, including up-to-date applicant fee costs for the different services, is outlined on the Home Office webpages.

**Are there any compliance requirements whilst I am on the scheme?**

As part of the University's continued sponsorship of your visa, you will need to undertake the following:

- Notify the International Student Office when you have received your new BRP and arrange to bring it in for the team to take a copy.
- Make contact by email with the International Student Office three times in the year at specific points.
- Inform the International Student Office of any changes to your circumstances, including changes to contact details, if you permanently leave the UK or switch into another visa category.

**Can my dependants apply?**

Any dependants that are in the UK with you will be able to extend their stay when you apply as a Tier 4 DES dependant. They are advised to apply at the same time as you, as part of the same application submission.

Dependants that are not yet residing in the UK can apply for entry clearance as a dependant under Tier 4 DES from overseas.

You can find more information on this process on our website as well as on the UK Visas & Immigration (UKVI) website.

**University status during DES**

The Doctorate Extension Scheme enables the University to provide continued immigration sponsorship to PhD graduates for one year after course completion. As you will have finished your studies, you will no longer have a student status with the University and your access to facilities and support will be restricted to services provided to all Cambridge alumni.
Frequently Asked Questions

Timings for Application

1. What is my expected completion/course end date?
   Your completion date is the date on which you expect to have your degree approved without condition by the Board of Graduate Studies, which includes having submitted the hardbound thesis. We will need to agree this expected date once you have had your viva and your corrections (if applicable) have been approved by your examiners.

2. When should I apply for the Doctorate Extension Scheme?
   You can apply for the scheme up to sixty days before your expected course end date. You must submit the visa application before your PhD receives unconditional approval (usually submission of hardbound thesis).

3. Will my course end date for DES be different to my original course end date?
   Yes, in most cases your course end date will be different to your original course end date which was stated in the CAS for your PhD.

4. What should I do if my current Tier 4 visa will expire before I expect to complete?
   If your current Tier 4 visa will expire before your expected completion date, you may need to extend your stay as a Tier 4 (General) student before applying for the Doctorate Extension Scheme. You would apply for DES at a later stage.

5. Is it a problem if I apply for DES very close to my visa expiry date?
   You must apply prior to your current visa expiring and before you complete your PhD. For some students this means they will be applying for close to when their current Tier 4 visa expires.

6. What happens at the Degree Committee and Board of Graduate Studies meetings?
   The outcome of your examination will be considered at a meeting of your Degree Committee and the Board of Graduate Studies. Following the Board of Graduate Studies meeting you will be sent official notification of this outcome. Students have up to three months to complete minor corrections and up to six months to complete major corrections from the date of the Board of Graduate Studies meeting. Depending on the outcome of your examination you will need to submit your corrected thesis to either your internal or external examiner or to both examiners. Once the Degree Committee confirm that you have completed any corrections to the satisfaction of your examiner(s), you would be invited to submit a hardbound and electronic copy of your thesis - these must both be submitted before your degree will be formally approved.

   You may be notified of the outcome informally after your viva and choose to start working on any corrections recommended by your examiners. If you do this and complete any corrections to the satisfaction of your examiner(s) prior to the Degree Committee or Board of Graduate Studies meetings, your PhD will likely be approved by the Board of Graduate Studies without correction. In this case, you would be invited to submit a hardbound and electronic copy of your thesis - these must both be submitted before your degree will be formally approved.

7. Where can I find dates for the Degree Committee and Board of Graduate Studies?
   Please see the Board of Graduate Studies website. Your viva result will first need to be considered by the relevant Degree Committee and will then go through the subsequent Board of Graduate Studies meeting.
8. What do I do if I have a pending Tier 4 extension application at the point I am ready to apply for the Doctorate Extension Scheme?

It may be possible to ‘vary’ your existing application but you should contact the International Student Office for further guidance if you think this will apply to you. If this is possible, you would still need to submit a new visa application, pay the associated fees and submit updated financial documentation. However you would be refunded the fees for your initial application.

Visa Application

9. When should I submit my visa application and how?

You apply using the Tier 4 online application and this includes a question which asks if you are applying for the Doctorate Extension Scheme.

10. Can I apply from overseas?

No, you must submit your visa application for DES from within the UK.

11. What do I have to do to receive a CAS and how long does this take to issue?

In order to receive a CAS you need to sign and return an undertaking and make a £50 payment. The International Student Office will provide further information on how to do this when you are at the relevant stage in the process. You must also agree an expected course end date before the CAS can be issued. We are able to issue the CAS within 5 working days of these steps being completed.

12. Do I need to submit an English language certificate or qualification documents with my application?

Your CAS will confirm your English language proficiency so you do not need to submit any further documentation in relation to this with your visa application. Your CAS is being issued based on the expected completion of your PhD and therefore no qualification documents need to be submitted with the visa application.

13. Are there specific requirements for the financial documentation?

Your financial documentation will need to show you have held £2030 for a minimum consecutive 28 day period, ending no more than one month before you apply for the visa. You should ensure your financial documents meet the requirements outlined in the Tier 4 Policy Guidance in the section entitled ‘Documents needed to show money available to you’.

The following nationalities qualify for differentiation arrangements under Tier 4:

Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Oman, Qatar, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, British National Overseas

If you will be applying using a passport issued by one of these countries, you do not need to submit your financial documents with your visa application. However the Home Office is entitled to request these documents during the consideration process so you are advised to ensure you have the funds in the manner specified under Tier 4 at the point of making your visa application.

14. Can I make an appointment to have my visa application checked?

You can make an appointment with the International Student Office to check over your visa application form and supporting documents before you submit them. Please email to request an appointment.
Responsibilities under DES

15. Do I need to register with the police?
   If police registration was required for your studies, you will need to update your certificate with your new visa details and any changes in address at your local Police Station.

16. What responsibilities do I have under the Doctorate Extension Scheme?
   As a sponsored student under DES, you are required to stay in contact with the University through the International Student Office. There will be three email contact points during the twelve months. You are required to present your visa for scanning within a week of receiving it. You must also inform us of changes to your circumstances, including changes to contact details, if you permanently leave the UK or switch into another visa category.

Working

17. Can I work whilst I am undertaking corrections?
   The period between submission of your thesis for examination until official notification of viva outcome from the Board of Graduate Studies is considered to be a vacation period and you can work full-time on your Tier 4 visa but restrictions on the type of work you can undertake apply.

   Once you have received official notification of your viva outcome from the Board of Graduate Studies, you are considered to be in ‘term time’ and must only work up to 20 hours a week.

   Once you have received unconditional approval of your PhD from the Board of Graduate Studies you can work full-time. If you have applied for the DES, you will be able to work with the less restrictive employment terms.

18. What options are available after the Doctorate Extension Scheme?
   You can switch into Tier 2, Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) or Tier 1 Entrepreneur inside the UK as long as your DES visa is still valid. You would need to meet the requirements for the relevant visa category. There is no option to extend the DES visa for longer than the initial 12 months. Other visa options may exist dependent on your personal circumstances.
Timeline for Doctorate Extension Scheme Application
The following timeline is for guidance only and the stages in the process to apply for DES may vary depending on individual circumstances.

1. Submission of softbound thesis
   - Complete an expression of interest form.
   - Check whether you need to apply for ATAS clearance.
   - Check when your current visa expires.

2. Viva Examination
   - Contact the International Student Office once you know the result of your viva.
   - Ensure that you start preparing documents for your visa application, particularly finances. The amount of money must have been in your account for 28 days prior to submitting your application.

3. Degree Committee/Board of Graduate Studies
   - Check when the next Degree Committee meeting is for your subject and the subsequent Board of Graduate Studies meeting.

4. Completion of corrections
   - Complete any required corrections and submit these to your examiners. Keep the International Student Office informed of the progress towards completing corrections and their approval.
   - Agree a course end date for your DES CAS once your corrections have been approved.
   - Complete the undertaking and make £50 payment.

5. Prepare and submit visa application
   - You should complete the Tier 4 online visa application once you receive the CAS and before submitting your hardbound thesis.
   - Ensure that your supporting documents meet the specific Home Office requirements.

6. Submission of hardbound thesis
   - You will have one month to submit your hardbound thesis once your corrections have been formally approved. Ensure that you make your DES visa application before your PhD is unconditionally approved.
   - Bring in your new visa for scanning once you have received it.