



# Aston University Credibility Interviews

## Table of Contents

1	Institutional Aims .....	3
2	Scope .....	3
3	Interview .....	3
3.1	Purpose of an interview .....	3
3.2	Who to interview .....	3
3.3	When to interview .....	3
3.4	How to Interview .....	4
3.5	Medium for Interview.....	4
3.6	Interview Assessment .....	5
3.7	Interview Decision.....	6
3.8	Interview Appeals .....	8
4	Thresholds for accepting credibility interviews .....	8
5	Progressing to Face-to-Face Interviews.....	9
6	Rejecting Applicants .....	9
7	Appendix A – Credibility Interview Selection Criteria .....	10

## 1 Institutional Aims

The aim of this policy is to provide guidance for the Visa Compliance Team (VCT) staff, International Recruitment Team, Admissions team and any recruiting agents as to when a student credibility interview is appropriate, how it ought to be conducted and the justification for conducting an interview.

## 2 Scope

This document applies to all of the staff who are involved in the interview process which VCT conduct for either new or current students who will be applying for a Student visa, by virtue of an Aston University Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies (CAS).

## 3 Interview

This section outlines how an interview will be conducted, and how decisions will be made.

### 3.1 Purpose of an interview

The University holds a Student Sponsor licence, with UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI), with a track record of compliance.

One of the requirements of the Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) is to ensure that refusal rates remain below 10%. If the VCT consider that an interview is necessary, then the university reserves the right to request such an interview to ensure that its refusal rates remain below 10% and to mitigate risk to its BCA metrics.

Aston University reserves the right to conduct a credibility interview with students that are deemed to be of potential risk to its licence, based on UKVI intelligence reports and local knowledge.

### 3.2 Who to interview

The Pre CAS-Questionnaire (CAS Shield) asks certain applicants to answer credibility style questions. If answers are not deemed satisfactory, VCT will request a face-to-face interview. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Factors taken into consideration when deciding whether a credibility interview is required are as follows are listed in the document

### 3.3 When to interview

Students will be invited to an interview automatically if they fall into any of the risk categories listed in [Who to interview](#).

Interviews will be reviewed in date order, but may be prioritised further at peak periods. Those who have completed the full process in CAS shield and have a high 'confidence' score will be prioritised.

A CAS will not be issued until the interview process is complete and satisfactory.

### 3.4 How to Interview

Students will be invited to undertake an interview through the CAS Shield system.

Students from high risk areas will be picked up automatically by the CAS shield system when they are imported from SITS, and others may be manually invited to an interview by the VCT through the CAS Shield dashboard.

Once this invitation is in place, the student will have a new section in their CAS shield dashboard, as a normal task to complete in the CAS process, and they will be tagged as *“Invited – Video Credibility”* in CAS Shield.

The student is given 7 days to complete the interview, and if they do not respond, they will be sent a reminder and given a further 7 days to complete the task. It is the responsibility of the student to complete the interview in a timely manner, and failure to complete the task will result in a compliance interview failure.

### 3.5 Medium for Interview

The CAS Shield *“MyInterview”* Programme is a video interview platform that gathers user-generated video responses.

Students are invited to undertake a pre-recorded video interview, and record their responses to the questions. The recordings are then made available to the Visa Compliance Team to review. Students are expected to complete the interview in a single session, should the interview end prematurely, either through user input or external factors (e.g., internet failure), the student is required to re-sit the entire interview irrespective of previous completion.

Student can make unlimited ‘attempts’ at the interview, for example, if their internet fails, they will be able to start the test again. If a student attempts the video more than 3 times, they will be automatically referred for a face to face interview.

Once the video interview has been completed, the student is unable to re-record the test, however, the Visa Compliance Team can, in exceptional circumstance, reset the interview for one more attempt. Students will be given an opportunity to re-record the interview recording once.

All students invited to interview will be asked 12 questions in total. This includes the same set of 10 questions for each student, and 2 random questions generated from a pre-approved list, none of which are made available to students prior to interview. This is to limit the opportunity to share question sets and allows the interviewee to speak on a personal topic allowing the assessor to assess their English language ability.

The standardised questions that aim to remove inconsistency from the interview process. Students do not face an interviewer and this allows them to proceed with answering questions without interference or possible bias.

The questions asked will simulate the same that would be asked during a Home Office credibility interview.

Once a student has completed their interview the *“Invited – Video Credibility”* tag, will change to *“Ready – Video Credibility”*

### 3.6 Interview Assessment

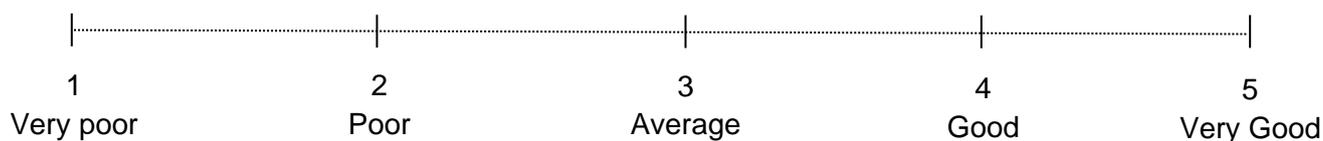
Once the student has completed the video interview, the recording is made available to the VCT team

The team review the recording within 3-5 working days and will either approve, reject or refer an applicant for a face to face interview, based on performance at that interview.

Interviews are conducted to assess whether the student is genuine, to gauge how their performance may be in an actual interview and how they communicate in English. Assessors will grade each standardised question out of 5 and provide commentary on the performance of each question.

Randomised questions will not feed into this grading system given that these answers are very likely to be subjective in nature. Feedback on randomised questions will feed into assessing a student's English Language capability,

Standardised questions will be graded as follows:



1 – Very poor	<p>Student provides an answer that demonstrates <b>no</b> fundamental understanding of the question asked and/or they <i>cannot provide</i> any such answer to the question.</p> <p>i.e., A very clearly bad answer that is profoundly incorrect. This could also be avoidance of the question or a substantial delay in answering a question to which it is clear that the student does not comprehend what has been asked. Possible indicator of low English language comprehension.</p>
2 - Poor	<p>Student provides an answer that demonstrates <b>little</b> fundamental understanding of the question asked and/or they only provide a <i>limited answer</i> to the question</p> <p>i.e., The student may have attempted and understood the question, but they do not properly answer it. An all-round bad answer that does not get to the heart of the question, or the answer is limited in the sense that the student is providing answers that are robotic or rehearsed.</p>
3 – Average	<p>Student provides an answer that demonstrates a <b>fair</b>, fundamental understanding of the question asked and/or they only provide a <i>general or basic</i> answer to the question</p> <p>i.e., Not thorough, but not a wholly incorrect or bad answer. Maybe they made some mistakes during their answer or forgot to list something when asked for a specific number of something. But the answer is at least natural in its delivery even if it is lacking in some substance.</p>

4 – Good	<p>Student provides an answer that demonstrates a <b>satisfactory</b>, fundamental understanding of the question asked and/or they provide an <i>extensive</i> answer to the question</p> <p>i.e., This is a good answer and is the general expectation. The answer should give confidence that the student has undertaken a fair amount of research and knows things that would take more than a cursory glance at a webpage. The student speaks naturally and confidently.</p>
5 – Very Good	<p>Student provides an answer that demonstrates a <b>more than satisfactory</b>, fundamental understanding of the question asked and/or they provide a <i>comprehensive</i> answer to the question</p> <p>i.e. This is the best answer and surpasses our general expectation. This answer clearly indicates a student has undertaken a lot of research and provides extremely in-depth answers. The student speaks naturally, confidently and knowledgably.</p>

### 3.7 Interview Decision

Only 10 questions will be graded. Random questions are not graded.

Note the first two questions are:

- 1) Please hold your passport or photo identification next to your face and clearly state your full name & Date of birth
- 2) What is the name of your course and how much are your tuition fees?

Assessors can still grade 1 or 5 based on general performance of task and English language capability. If the student performs the task satisfactorily, without issue, then the assessor will give grade 5. If the student does not perform the task adequately or gives a fundamentally wrong answer, e.g., does not provide a passport, does not know the name of the course or gives a wholly wrong tuition fee, the assessor will give a grade 1.

Whilst random questions are not graded, if a student is unable to respond to these questions or provides an irrelevant answer, it is likely the interview will be marked as failed with a concern over English ability. For example:

*Example: Do you have any brothers or sisters*

*Answer: I will be studying in Birmingham*

#### Total possible score of 50.

Following grading of each standardised question, the total shall be tallied. Total points in the following table will determine the outcome

<b>35+</b>	Pass – Issue CAS: Inform student of pass and mark “Ready for CAS” assuming all other criteria met.
------------	--

<b>30 – 34</b>	Borderline – referral to face-to-face interview: Inform student further interview to be undertaken and mark as “face to face required” on CAS Shield.
<b>29 and below</b>	Rejection – no CAS issued: Inform student of rejection and appeal process.

Assessors must account for the following when assessing an interview:

**1) Verification**

The Assessor must check the students Passport ID page and identify the person sitting the interview is the same. Assessors must be conscious of the possibility of someone else sitting the interview.

**2) Language barrier and English language capability**

The Assessor must use their judgement to determine whether the student has a satisfactory level of English. It is not the role of the assessor to determine whether the student’s English is “good or bad”, but instead, if the student can:

- Undertake a course at degree level that will be taught entirely in English
- Communicate clearly if interviewed by the Home Office.

Whilst a student is expected to be proficient at English to an academic B2 level, this primarily relates to academic English, and it must be remembered that the majority of international students will not utilise English as their primary language. A language barrier here not only relates to a student’s academic understanding of reading, writing, listening and speaking English, but it relates to the cultural nuances of how certain terms are received and understood.

This this may lead to some misunderstanding of the question asked or usage of different terms not common to native British English speakers.

If the student still provides a concise and natural answer to a question while maybe misunderstanding the context of the question, for example, “how will your course be assessed” has sometimes been taken to mean “what does the course consist of”, then the assessor should use their judgement to grade relative to the answer provided.

**3) Nerves and unseen disabilities**

Whilst a pre-recorded interview removes the presence of an “authority”, we can assume the student will still understand the context of the interview and recognise that performance of this interview may hinder their future plans.

Assessors should recognise that nervousness, general anxiety and other neurodivergent behaviours can impact a student’s ability to answer clearly. It is important not to assume a student’s English Language ability because of the presence of stuttering or delayed answers.

**4) Unconscious bias**

All staff at Aston University are to undergo mandatory Unconscious Bias training on Blackboard. It is important to remember that unconscious bias can influence decision making irrespective of training and it is recommended that an assessor, prior to rejecting interviews, discuss this decision with other CAS officers to enforce impartiality

**5) Body language, robotic and rehearsed answers**

Assessors are to assess performance of an interview in its entirety. This not only includes assessing the substance of the answers but also their delivery, keeping in mind the factors listed above. It is not expected that a student maintains constant eye contact with the camera, however assessors must use their judgement in whether the student is not answering naturally.

It is expected that a student would undertake a genuine level of research to study in the UK and refer themselves to online materials at times, but determinations should be made on whether answers seem “rehearsed or scripted”

Because of the nature of the interview format, it will be difficult to confirm definitively whether a student is reading from a script. However, there should be some clear tells that will help determine this.

- Student eyes clearly move from across the screen while speaking
- Student continues to look down into their lap
- Student continues to look past the camera. This could indicate someone else is in the room
- Students recites verbatim from online sources

### 3.8 Interview Appeals

Students will be given the opportunity to appeal a failed credibility result in two stages:

Stage 1: A student must respond to a failed decision in writing within 48 hours. Once received, the full interview will be reviewed by a different member of the VCT. If the decision is still to fail, the student will be given the option to move to stage 2.

Stage 2: A student appeals the second review and is then referred to the Director of Student Experience for a final decision.

In all cases, the student has the right to make a formal complaint to the University under the normal route.

## 4 Thresholds for accepting credibility interviews

The following is a list of concerns that Aston would perceive as raising red flags in an interview (not exhaustive):

- Poor English
- Unable to communicate adequately
- Evidence of looking elsewhere in an interview, suggesting they may be reading off notes
- Unable to answer questions appropriately
- Poor research
- Not providing ID documents
- Reason to believe interviewee is not the student
- Two interviews conducted and still not able to communicate or answer questions appropriately

## 5 Progressing to Face-to-Face Interviews

Students who have failed the video interview, will be contacted by the VCT to confirm the reasons the interview was marked as failed, and invite them to a face to face meeting, with a pre-selected date and time included.

On confirmation of the date and time, the student will be invited to a Teams meeting with the Visa Compliance Credibility Officer or other member of the VCT.

This interview will be recorded, and will take a similar format to the recorded interview, but allows the interviewer deeper investigation if necessary.

Interviews will be assessed in the same manner as outlined in [Interview Decision – Decision](#), however, in line with the University Sponsor licence and risk requirements, any students that scores 34 or less, putting them in the borderline band, after a face to face interview will be rejected.

## 6 Rejecting Applicants

Irrespective of a student's offer status with Aston and ONCampus Aston; a student will not be issued a CAS if the VCT reject their credibility interview.

Decisions on rejection will be based solely on the credibility interview. Other factors such as immigration history, educational background are not to be considered. The interviews mimic a credibility interview by UKVI and as UKVI do not take other issues into consideration, Aston University will do the same.

Students that are rejected will also have the relevant admissions team copied in so that they can reject the student's application.

Students who have failed a credibility interview will not be eligible to apply for a further course until the next academic cycle, and then must submit a new application.

## 7 Appendix A – Credibility Interview Selection Criteria

This list is not exhaustive and is just indicative of a variety of factors that can lead to a credibility interview:

- Significant or inconsistent gaps in study, and/or any other factor related to previous study as listed in Student and Child Student Version 3.0, Modernised guidance Published for Home Office staff on 06 April 2021, p.14-17 ([Student and Child Student \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))
- Applications from India: Any applicant resident in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Gujarat and Telangana
- Any Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian or Nigerian applicant if applying with dependants
- Previous visa refusals and/or an adverse immigration history
- Personal statements that include details copied directly from the Aston University website, or similarities in wording to other applicants.
- Suspicious documentation relating to English language or previous qualifications, for example, spelling errors, mixture of fonts not in line with main document, text misaligned, words crossed out, bad quality copies so text is unreadable.
- Intelligence gathered by international, regional and local partners/colleagues suggesting that a student, or group of students, may be high risk. For example, students from particular schools or colleges of concern, or with document of sponsorship from particular financial institutions of concern.
- A recognisable pattern of fraudulent activity identified as a possible risk in the Higher Education Sector, for example a pattern of applicants with identical surnames and identical degree awards.

Aston International, Admissions Staff, International Student Advice Team and Visa Compliance Team may carry out individual spot checks of a student file and if they consider that a credibility interview is required then the student will be required to attend an interview, based on the criteria above. In addition, the following will always be asked to attend a credibility interview:

- Applicants from Africa who are being financially sponsored by a mining company or local government agency
- Applicants from Pakistan, **unless** they have a degree from one of the following institutions
  - COMSATS University Islamabad
  - Dow University of Health Sciences
  - National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences (NU-FAST)
  - Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering Sciences and Technology
  - IBA (Institute of Business Administration) Karachi
  - LUMS (Lahore University of Management Sciences)
  - NUST (National University of Sciences and Technology Islamabad)
  - PIEAS (Pakistan Institute of Engineering and Applied Sciences)
  - Quaid-i-Azam University
  - The University of Lahore
  - UET Lahore (University of Engineering & Technology, Lahore)
- Applicants from India who have a qualification from one of the following institutions:
  - Christ Church, Lucknow or Christ Church College, Lucknow
  - Any school with the word 'Kheri'
  - St. Andrews Public School, Nainital
  - St. John's School, Ghazipur
  - St. Mary's School

- St. Xaveer's International School
- The Indian Academy
- Global Convent School
- Chhatrapat Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur
- Kumaun University
- Mahatma Jyotiba Pule Rohilkand University
- Veer Bahadur Singh Purvanchal University