

July 2019

The beginners' course in Russian at Oxford, for which you have been offered a place, is intended for students who have no experience of the language. We aim to give a thorough grounding in Russian from the beginning, and therefore recommend that you do not embark on studying Russian by yourself or on other courses before you come here, partly because you may find yourself marking time when you arrive in Oxford, but mainly because we think you are likely to get off to a less satisfactory start. **I will however send a recording of some readings in Russian by a native speaker so that you can listen to these, if you would find this useful; please let me know by email (catriona.kelly@new.ox.ac.uk).** Of course there is also plenty of Russian available on the internet, often in the form of enjoyable Youtube videos and feature films.

If you have time to spend on preparation for the beginners' course in Russian, there is plenty that you can usefully do without starting to learn the language on your own. It would be a good idea to familiarize yourself with the historical and cultural background to the course by reading introductions to Russian history, e.g. Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire* (1997), and his *A History of The Soviet Union: Final Edition* (1992), or J. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour* (1992), or one of the histories published to mark the centenary of the Revolution (the books by Stephen A. Smith and by Mark D. Steinberg are particularly useful). A handy guide to Russian literary history is V. Terras, *A History of Russian Literature* (1993), and the more recent one by Andrew Wachtel and Ilya Vinitsky is also good. You could also start exploring Russian literature in translation – for instance, any work by major nineteenth- and twentieth-century prose writers and dramatists such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Andrei Bely, Bulgakov, Babel, Solzhenitsyn, and more recently Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, Venedikt Erofeyev, Yury Dombrovsky, the essays of Joseph Brodsky, and so on. Anthologies such as Andrew Reynolds' collection of recent prose, or Catriona Kelly, ed., *Utopias*, are also quite a good way in. Do not feel that it is essential to purchase everything – you may well find that a local library can supply you with a good selection.

Very useful to buy in advance would be a reference Russian grammar and a dictionary or two. Terence Wade, *Comprehensive Russian Grammar* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), is a good recommendation; the equivalent work by Offord is also very good. The best bilingual dictionary is the *Oxford Russian Dictionary* (OUP): it may seem over-ambitious to go for the largest size at first, but this would be a good investment for the future, and you could get a smaller version alongside to help you in the first months. If money is tight, think about second-hand copies of the old *Oxford Russian-English Dictionary* and *Oxford English-Russian Dictionary*, or – if all else fails – the Soviet Smirnitsky and Myuller two-volume *Anglo-russkii* and *Russko-angliiskii slovari*.

As you will have gathered from your interview in December, one of the requirements for our beginners' course in Russian is that you should spend the second year in Russia on an approved language course. We expect this to be a specially designed eight-month course which has been arranged in Yaroslavl' for our Oxford students by a British charitable organization, Russian Language Undergraduate Studies Ltd (www.rlus.co.uk), and their local Russian partner, Yaroslavl' State University. We have chosen RLUS and Yaroslavl' State University because we believe that they offer good value for money: RLUS has about thirty

years' experience of organizing courses in Russia for British students, has strong links with our Embassy and the British Council there, monitors teaching quality and provides pastoral support; the standard of teaching provided by Yartek is high, the costs of living in Yaroslavl' are less than in Moscow or St Petersburg, and the opportunities of meeting Russians are greater. However, it is for you to decide whether you are willing to spend the second year of your university studies on the RLUS course in Yaroslavl' before you commit yourself definitely to a place on our beginners' course in Russian.

If you are happy to make this commitment, it would be a good idea to start planning your finances for the year in Russia. From the information we have now, the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages will arrange to pay Russian Language Undergraduate Studies Ltd (RLUS) the course fee for the language tuition, currently £2,496. You will, however, be responsible for covering all other costs relating to your year abroad, including living expenses (rent and food etc.), visa fees, and flights, as well as the Year Abroad fee of £1360.

If you have any questions about the year in Russia or about its financial implications, you should get in touch with me – I will act as your liaison officer with RLUS.

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