

TIER 4/STUDENT VISA ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY

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1. Background

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students should familiarise themselves with the University of Reading's [Policy on and procedures relating to student academic engagement and fitness to study](#) and the [Attendance Management and Engagement Policy](#). Postgraduate Research students should familiarise themselves with the [Code of Practice on Research Students](#) and the [Policy on and procedures relating to PhD and MPhil student academic engagement and fitness to study](#).

All Undergraduate students are also expected to comply with the academic requirements set out in the University of Reading's [Statement of learner responsibilities](#), in particular those requirements relating to engagement with the Academic Tutor system, attendance and participation in all lectures, seminars, practicals, fieldwork and tutorials and the submission of all written or practical coursework.

The University of Reading, as a Student sponsor, is required by UK Visas & Immigration (UKVI) to ensure that its Tier 4/Student visa holders are academically engaging throughout the period of leave for which they are being sponsored. [UKVI states](#) that *"a student is academically engaging if they are actively and consistently following their course of study."*

The University of Reading, as a higher education provider, is also required by UKVI to monitor and review students' academic engagement according to the requirements set out in UKVI's [Student Sponsor Guidance](#).

This policy sets out how the University will monitor and support the engagement of its Tier 4/Student visa holders and what will happen if engagement is unsatisfactory or falls below the required attendance levels, where a required level/percentage of attendance has been set by UKVI.

All Tier 4/Student visa holders are subject to this policy until the end of their programme or the duration of their visa, whichever is the earlier.

The policy is applicable during University of Reading term time, applicable to the relevant programme. The University is not required to monitor academic engagement of its students during official University of Reading vacation periods or during the post-study period once the student has completed all aspects of their programme.

Students referred into the academic engagement and fitness to study process may also be referred to the Home Office Compliance Officer for review. Other staff within the University, including academic, support centre staff and School Support Team for Postgraduate Research students, may also notify the Home Office Compliance Officer of students whose engagement is of concern. Appropriate action will then be determined based on the circumstances.

The Head of International Student Advisory Team & Home Office Compliance, supported by the Home Office Compliance Officer, has overall responsibility for the engagement monitoring process and for notifying UKVI/withdrawing visa sponsorship if a student has not engaged as required.

2. Definitions of Terms used in this policy:

UKVI: UK Visas and Immigration: the part of the UK Government's Home Office which is responsible for making decisions on who has the right to enter and/or remain in the UK

Sponsored students: Students who hold current Tier 4/Student visas

RQF level: The UK's Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)- each programme will be assigned an RQF level and the relevant section of this policy will apply accordingly

Stage 1: School Review meeting- see the University's [Policy on and procedures relating to student academic engagement and fitness to study](#) and [Policy on and procedures relating to PhD and MPhil student academic engagement and fitness to study](#)

Stage 2: Case Review by a Teaching and Learning Dean- see the University's [Policy on and procedures relating to student academic engagement and fitness to study](#) OR Case Review by Doctorate Research Office- see the [Policy on and procedures relating to PhD and MPhil student academic engagement and fitness to study](#)

Stage 3: Standing Committee on Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study- see the University's [Policy on and procedures relating to student academic engagement and fitness to study](#) and [Policy on and procedures relating to PhD and MPhil student academic engagement and fitness to study](#)

3. Band 1- Study at RQF level 5 (SCQF 8 and equivalents) and below

Each sponsored student in this band is required to attend a minimum of 15 hours of daytime (08:00 to 18:00, Monday to Friday) classroom-based study per week.

International Foundation Year programmes

Engagement is monitored for students on the International Foundation Programme or on programmes with the International Foundation Year by the [International Study and Language Institute](#) (ISLI) through the use of daily attendance registers, which are filled in by module tutors to

record the number of hours of attendance/absence in a given week. This is done through RISIS, data from which is then converted to a School Excel spreadsheet by the ISLI Program Support team.

Where a student has not reached 85% attendance of their classroom-based study in any given week, the reason for the student's absence will be reviewed and an initial engagement concern letter issued. ISLI will annotate the student's record with the reason for their non-attendance and the steps being taken to improve their attendance.

A further monthly review of attendance data will identify students whose engagement has fallen below 85% across the month.

Where a student's attendance falls below 80% in any given week, the student will be called for a meeting with their Academic Tutor. If there is no improvement the attendance data over the next two weeks, the student will be referred to a Stage 1 meeting with one of the School Directors of Academic Tutoring. Depending on circumstances, an action plan to improve attendance and engagement will be set.

Where a student's attendance falls below 70% in any given month, the student will be referred for a Stage 1 meeting with the School Director of Academic Tutoring.

Where a student's attendance falls below 70% for two consecutive months, the student will be referred for a Stage 2 meeting with the Teaching and Learning Dean.

Where a student's attendance falls below 70% for three consecutive months, the University of Reading is required to inform UKVI and withdraw its visa sponsorship due to lack of academic engagement, unless there are exceptional and evidenced reasons for the non-attendance (e.g., illness).

Pre-Sessional English Programmes

Engagement is monitored for students on Pre-Sessional English programmes by ISLI through the use of daily attendance registers in Excel.

Where a student has not reached 85% attendance of their classroom-based study in any given week, the student's record will be annotated with the reason for their non-attendance and the steps being taken to improve their attendance. If there is insufficient improvement in the following five days of study, the student will be referred to the Programme Director and issued with an initial engagement concern letter.

If there continues to be insufficient improvement in the following five days of study after the letter, the student will be referred for a Stage 1 meeting with one of the School Directors of Academic Tutoring. Depending on circumstances, an action plan to improve attendance and engagement will be set.

Further steps, if necessary, to be taken in line with the [Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study Policy](#).

Where a student's attendance falls below 70% for three consecutive months, the University of Reading is required to inform UKVI and withdraw its visa sponsorship due to lack of academic engagement unless there are exceptional and evidenced reasons for the non-attendance (e.g., illness).

4. Band 2 – Study at RQF 6 (SCQF 9/10 and equivalents), RQF 7 (Taught and Research) (SCQF 11 and equivalents)

Undergraduate and Post-Graduate Taught students

The University will monitor academic engagement through activities such as:

- Attending timetabled lectures/seminars/workshops/practical sessions/visits and virtual events
- Attending scheduled assessments/in-class and online tests/presentations and examinations
- Accessing and using Blackboard
- Attending meetings with personal tutors or research supervisors
- Attending meetings with placement coordinators and Study Abroad equivalent (where the student is on an authorised work placement/study abroad as part of their programme)
- Submitting coursework, dissertations, essays or reports
- Attending an oral examination (viva)
- Undertaking required laboratory work
- Undertaking research or fieldwork
- Attending an appointment with a welfare adviser or international student adviser
- On campus Library usage

The Home Office Compliance Officer, within the International Student Advisory Team, will review various data sets on a weekly basis, including Blackboard login data, combined attendance data from in-person or online taught sessions, on campus Library usage and Blackboard collaborate taught sessions to identify students with engagement falling below expected and required levels.

Students who record zero positive engagement indicators (from the above list) will be sent a warning email by the Home Office Compliance Officer requesting an explanation as to why they have not been engaging, and to remind them of their visa conditions regarding academic engagement.

Students who continue to record zero positive engagement indicators for a further week after receiving the warning email from the Home Office Compliance Officer will be referred to the relevant School Support Centre for further information about their overall programme engagement.

If a student fails to engage for a 60-day period, the University of Reading is required to inform UKVI and withdraw its visa sponsorship, irrespective of whether the student has formally requested to withdraw/suspend from their programme, except in exceptional and evidenced circumstances (see section 11).

5. Band 2 – Study at RQF8 (SCQF 12 and equivalents)

Postgraduate Research students

Full-time PGR students are required by the University to attend at least one formal supervision meeting each month. These meetings must take place in-person and the date of the meeting must be recorded on RISIS.

Full-time PGR students are required by the University to attend at least one formal supervision meeting each month. These meetings must take place in-person and the date of the meeting must be recorded on RISIS. It would be acceptable for a supervision meeting to be held online as a one-off arrangement if the supervisor is away from the University for that month. If both the supervisor and secondary supervisor are to be away from the University on an extended period of annual leave, research leave or sabbatical and therefore unavailable to meet with the student in-person for more

than one month, alternative in-person contact points should be arranged. In this scenario, the Home Office Compliance Officer should be consulted to confirm what the alternative contact point should be.

If a student fails to engage with this process or no data is recorded on the student's RISIS record, for 60 consecutive days, the matter will be escalated to the Doctoral Research Office for further investigation. If, after further investigation, there is found to have been no academic engagement during this period, the situation will be referred to the Head of the International Student Advisory and the Home Office Compliance Team and a decision about sponsorship withdrawal will be made.

6. Students on periods of research away

Sponsored students who intend to be away from the University for a period of research away during term-time must seek prior authorisation from their supervisor and the Doctoral Research Office by submitting a [PGR Research Away form](#).

Students are expected to be in contact with their designated point of contact at a minimum of once a month. Students must fully engage with this process.

Students who do not maintain contact with the University as required or if they do not return from their period of research away by their agreed date of return without an approved extension, will be referred to the Home Office Compliance Officer and visa sponsorship may be withdrawn.

7. Students on work placements

Tier 4/Student visa holders are permitted to undertake work placements which are confirmed as an assessed and integral part of the programme, and which do not exceed a maximum of 50% of the total duration of the programme (unless there is an essential statutory requirement for the placement to exceed 50%). All placements must be authorised in advance through the relevant school and the placement team, and the details of the work placement must be reported to UKVI in advance of the placement starting.

It is a UKVI requirement that the attendance of all sponsored students is monitored whilst on work placements as part of their programme.

Students on work placements are expected to attend their placement as per the terms of the [work placement agreement](#).

Students must maintain contact with the University and respond timely to all correspondence sent to their University email account whilst on placement. They are expected to be in contact with their placement coordinator or other designated colleague at a minimum of once a month.

Students who fail to engage as required whilst on a work placement will be referred to their relevant department at the University and the Home Office Compliance Officer, and visa sponsorship may be withdrawn.

8. Students on study-abroad programmes

It is a UKVI requirement that the attendance of all sponsored students is monitored whilst on Study Abroad programmes.

The student must register their attendance with the host organisation, who will provide the University with a certificate of attendance each month.

Students who fail to engage as required whilst on their Study Abroad programme will be referred to their relevant department at the University and the Home Office Compliance Officer, and visa sponsorship may be withdrawn.

9. Dissertation/thesis periods

Students who are working on/writing-up their dissertations are still in term-time, even if there is no formal teaching scheduled, and are therefore subject to term-time engagement expectations and associated engagement monitoring arrangements.

These students are expected to be in contact with their dissertation/thesis supervisor at a minimum of once a month and their engagement with their programme will continue to be monitored by the Home Office Compliance Officer in line with the process set out in Section 4.

Students are expected to be working on their dissertations/thesis from within the UK, as distance learning is not permitted under the Tier 4/Student route. The University may be required to withdraw visa sponsorship for students who are found to be completing their dissertation/thesis from outside the UK.

Any research-away related inquiry will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Students should also familiarise themselves with the Study in the UK eligibility requirement of the [Graduate Route](#).

10. Student Union Sabbatical Officers

During their 12-month post, a sponsored student undertaking the role of sabbatical officer is expected to have one engagement contact per month. A sponsorship agreement will be signed to confirm expectations of all parties.

Reading Students' Union is responsible for monitoring the student's attendance and providing details to the Home Office Compliance Officer on a monthly basis.

Types of acceptable contact are:

- Email confirmation from the RUSU Deputy Chief Executive detailing their attendance and any absences during the period.
- Meetings with ISAT.

11. Exceptions and exceptional circumstances

The University considers exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis. These would be expected to be formally lodged through the University ECF process and provided any supporting

evidence for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students. Students on Postgraduate Research students should contact Doctoral Research Office.

12. Managerial Oversight and review

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary, as the Student Licence Authorising Officer for the University and a member of the University's Executive Board, meets with key staff (Head of International Student Advisory Team, Director of Student Services (or their delegate), Student and Academic Services Manager and Director of Centre for Quality Support & Development) as required to review the University's working practices and to ensure compliance with its obligations under its Sponsor licence and Sponsor status. The group reports to the Executive Board.

Overall oversight of all the University's Home Office Sponsor Licences and Compliance with licence requirements rests with the licence's Authorising Officers. The University's Tier 4/Student Licence Authorising Officer is the Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary, Richard Messer. The University's Workers licence and Temporary Workers licence (previous Tier 2 and 5) Authorising Officer is the Director of Human Resources, Claire Rolstone. Authorising Officers report compliance status and assurance to the University Executive Board.

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Policy to be reviewed annually or when required in response to new guidance issued by the Home Office.

Version control

| Version | Keeper | Reviewed | Approved by | Approval date |
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