Important Information for international students

Tier 4 (General) & Student Visas – How to comply



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ACADEMIC YEAR 2026-27

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- **Ensure you comply**

  As a Student Visa/Tier 4 visa holder you need to ensure that you comply with the conditions of your visa. If you do not, the consequences can be very serious. Breaching the conditions of your visa may mean that you commit a criminal offence and that the UK government could deny you entry to the UK for a number of years.

  You must let the University know if there are changes to your circumstances that could affect your visa.

- **Our responsibilities as Student Visa Sponsor**

  The RAU is your Educational Student Visa sponsor and we have to inform the Home Office in case:

  - You suspend your studies, transfer course, withdraw from your course or complete your studies earlier than the scheduled end date of the course
  - You fail to register/enrol at the start of your course and you have provided no explanation
  - You are absent for an extended period from your studies and we have been unable to contact you or find out the reason for your absence. The University will keep an electronic record of your attendance and the Home Office can ask to see it.
  - We become aware that you have breached the conditions of your visa

- **Study restrictions**

  Your student visa will contain the University's sponsor licence (VT0Q9ERW3) which allows you to study at the RAU. Without it, you will be in breach of your visa conditions and this will put your visa at risk. If you wish to discuss this, please contact visas@rau.ac.uk

- **Keep you record and details up to date**

  Ensure that your record and personal details are up to date. You must ensure that your contact and personal details we keep for you are up to date. This includes changes in your passport and travel documents. It is your responsibility to update your details by login to the student portal and updating your profile contact details. If you have any problems regarding this, please contact the Visa Compliance Office.

  You also need to report any change of circumstances to the Home Office if you have a visa or BRP. Please visit the government website https://www.gov.uk/change-circumstances-visa-brp/youre-in-the-uk-and-dont-have-a-brp to download the relevant form and view extended information on the subject.

  If you are going to be away from the University for a long period, inform the Visa Compliance Office, Registry and your School. Remember the University must inform

the Home Office when there is a long-term unexpected and unexplained period of absence, even if you continue studying while you are away.

When you register as a student, we will ask you for a scanned copy of your passport and your share code. If your passport does not have an entry stamp you will need to provide us with a copy of your boarding pass/ticket to show the date you have entered the UK. This date must be on or after the start date of your visa.

If you receive a new passport or visa extension whilst studying at the RAU you must take/e-mail copies of these to the Visa Compliance Office.

- **Registration and attendance**

  You must attend all your classes, lectures, tutorials, and submit your required coursework on time. For example, if you cannot attend due to illness, you must inform your Academic Department and submit where required a Request for Extension or Deferral due to Exceptional Circumstances. It is important that you check your RAU student email account regularly and respond to the communications sent to you by the University.

  HOW TO SHOW YOU ARE ATTENDING

  STANDARD PROCESS

  The University is operating an electronic system for recording student attendance. There are card readers provided at all lecture theatres/rooms. Students will have to scan their student ID card to "clock in" to their classes. If there are unauthorised absences, these will be monitored and the system will automatically send alerts to your Academic Department and your Personal Tutor as well as email /sms to you. **You should scan your student ID when attending your classes / seminars/ workshops / laboratories.**



EVISAS FROM JANUARY 2025

UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) moved to a digital visa system from 1 January 2025. This means the UKVI has replaced student visas (in physical documents like BRP) with an online record of your immigration status (also known as an e-Visa).

All visas are now electronic. These are called e-Visas. You'll be able to prove your immigration status online. **To do that you first need to create a UKVI account.**

See the videos below:

1) What is an e-Visa (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-immigration-status-evisa-help-video/what-is-an-evisa)
2) How to create a UKVI account and access your eVisa (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IqAbBCfBYI)
3) How to travel with your e-Visa https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-immigration-status-evisa-help-video/how-to-travel-with-your-evisa-video

What shall I do if I encounter problems with creating my UKVI account or accessing my e-Visa?

In the first instance, please check your UKVI email for the online help resources they provide. Alternatively, you may be able to contact them for help via this UKVI website.

How do I know if I have a UKVI account or not?

You should have a UKVI account if you used the 'UK Immigration: ID Check app' to verify your identity as part of your immigration application process.

If you applied for your visa by submitting your biometric details in person at a Visa Application Centre, then it is likely that you do not have a UKVI account yet.

An important note about your UKVI account - You must not share your UKVI account with anyone else as this account should only be owned and accessed by yourself to provide your immigration status proof when required.

I already have a UKVI account, do I need to do anything?

If you already have a UKVI account you should have access to an e-Visa, you should be able to continue to use the same account to View and Prove your immigration status.
You need to make sure that you keep your UKVI account up-to-date with any changes to your personal details (including your name, nationality and appearance), your contact details (address, email, and phone number) and your identity documents (your current BRP and/or passport).
You must also ensure that you have a current identity document linked to your UKVI account at all times. You can find out how to update your UKVI account here.

I think there is an error with my BRP or e-Visa, what should I do?

You can find information about what to do if you think there is an error with your BRP or visa here. When you get confirmation of the correction arrange to send us a new Share code.

What shall I do after having access to my e-Visa?

You will need to generate a share code using the UKVI View and Prove your immigration status service (the share code must begin with the letter S) so you can send by email to visas@rau.ac.uk to update your student e-Visa record at the University.

What should I do when travelling overseas?

From 2025, airlines and other carriers are able to digitally check your e-Visa to confirm your immigration status if your passport is linked to your UKVI account.

When you create your UKVI account, you must add the details of any passport you wish to use for travel. You can find out how to update your UKVI account here.

How to get further help?

In an unlikely event, if you have not heard from the UKVI or have further issues with updating your UKVI account, you can get in touch with the University Student Visa Compliance team by email for help on visas@rau.ac.uk quoting your student ID number with the description of the issues encountered.

RIGHT-TO-STUDY CHECK

As you hold a student visa you are subject to immigration control, and you need to complete a Right-to-Study check**.** This will take place during/around registration.

- **WHY DO WE CARRY OUT A 'RIGHT TO STUDY' CHECK**

  The Royal Agricultural University holds a Student Sponsor License and we have to meet a number of sponsor duties to sponsor students to study in the UK with the RAU.

  One of our responsibilities is to ensure that every student studying at the University has the right immigration permission to study in the UK during the whole period of their study. To comply with the requirement we need to check the immigration information that you provide to ensure it meets the UKVI requirements and that you have the Right to Study in the UK.

- **WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DO NOT COMPLETE THE RIGHT TO STUDY CHECK**

  If you do not provide the documents requested, or if your documents do not meet UKVI requirements, we may require you to withdraw from the University.

If you have any questions relating to your right to study in the UK please e-mail us at: visas@rau.ac.uk

- **DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR THE RIGHT-TO-STUDY CHECK**

You will need to send copies of the following **immigration documents:**

All students with an e-visa:

- You will need to provide us with a share code that you can obtain via the government website: https://www.gov.uk/view-prove-immigration-status. Please note: we cannot accept the right to work or right to rent share codes. **AND**

- Airline ticket/booking pass proving you arrived in the UK on or after the date your Student visa is valid from or date of entry stamp in your passport.

- Copy of the UKVI decision letter

N.B.: If you have not applied yet or have a partially completed application, you won't be able to study with us

Change of Student status during your studies

- **If you suspend your studies for more than 60 days** because of medical or financial reasons the Home Office will expect you to return to your home country unless you are not medically able to do so. The university will have to report your suspension to the Home Office within 10 days from the start of your suspension. The Home Office will cancel your visa. To return to your studies in the UK you will need to apply for a new CAS and a new student visa from outside the UK.
- **If you need to suspend your studies for less than 60 days** because of medical or financial reasons the University will continue to sponsor you. You may stay in the UK during that period and the University will contact you to ensure compliance with our duties as a Student Visa sponsor. It is important that you respond to these communications. If you need to extend the period of suspension to more than 60 days then the University will have to report this to the Home Office and withdraw its sponsorship. You will then have to leave the UK and re-apply for a Student visa to return to your studies.
- **To transfer course without completing the course you were given permission to stay**
  Immigration rules changed on 6th April 2016. As a result, only some students can change from the course they are registered on for another course without first completing their studies. Conditions will differ depending on when you applied for your leave (visa).
    - **Students who applied before 13 April 2013**
      If you applied for your current leave before 13 April 2013 you can change to a new course at a higher, lower or at the same level without applying for a new Visa.
    - **Students who applied between 13 April 2013 and 5 November 2014**
      You can only change from your current course without needing to apply for a new Visa to start your new course if the new course is:

      - *At the same or a higher level than the current course; or*
      - *a lower level, provided the conditions and requirements of your visa are the same as they would be had you made an application for [the new course you wish to switch to] new course (instead of their current course for which they were granted leave) at the time you applied for your current course.*

If you transfer your course within the RAU, we will need to inform the Home Office. If your new course is shorter, the length of your visa may be reduced. If the new course is longer you will need to apply to extend your visa before your current visa expires.

If you have **applied for your Visa** you can only change course at the RAU if:

- you haven't completed the course for which your CAS was assigned
- the course is at degree level or above
- the new course isn't at a lower level than the previous course for which you were granted leave
- you will be able to complete the new course within your current period of leave

- If you fail a summer exam and cannot retake it or attend class in the first 60 days of the semester you must return to your home country. The University will inform the Home Office who may cancel your visa. To return to retake your exam you will normally need a student short-term student visa especially if you are not resuming studies within 60 days of the last examination or where there are gaps between examinations of more than 60 days. To continue your studies after a successful resit you need to return home and apply for a new student visa.
- If you withdraw from your course, the University will inform the Home Office. If you have more than 60 days remaining on your visa then your visa may be curtailed (cut short). You should arrange to leave the UK as soon as you withdraw from your course.
- If you do fieldwork overseas this should not affect your Tier 4/Student visa provided that you are enrolled, you have agreed this period of research away from the university and you have the University's approval to do so. You will be expected to return to the University to continue your studies after your overseas fieldwork research. Please note that you must stay in touch with your Academic Department while you are out of the UK.
- If you undertake **a work placement** as part of your course, we will need to inform the Home Office of the location and duration of your work placement. If you undertake a work placement that has been approved by the RAU and is connected to your studies you will need to provide The Visa Compliance Office the following information before your placement starts otherwise your student visa may be at risk:
    - Name of the organisation offering the work placement
    - Address of the organisation
    - Reason why it is necessary as part of your studies
    - Start and end date of the work placement
    - Name and contact details of the supervisor at work placement

Interrupting your studies

If you take an interruption of studies, the University is required to withdraw its sponsorship and report this to the Home Office. The Home Office will curtail your visa and you will be required to leave the UK or submit an alternative visa application within 60 days of the date of the report. When you wish to return from interruption, the University will issue you with

a new CAS to apply for a new Student visa. Visa students have to follow the University policy for withdrawal/interruption/intermission of studies. Please contact registry@rau.ac.uk and visas@rau.ac.uk to obtain advice.

There are certain circumstances in which the University will not withdraw its sponsorship of your visa during a period of interruption, which are:

- Your period of interruption is 60 days or less, and you provide your School of study with clear reasons why an interruption is required. This request must be approved by your School/Director of Studies. You can take a maximum of four months of interruption during your course without the University withdrawing immigration sponsorship, but no one period of interruption can be for more than 60 days.
- In exceptional circumstances, the University will continue sponsorship during a period of interruption of more than 2 months. This will only be in cases where there is clear proof that a student cannot return to their home country. This would normally be due to serious illness or injury.

  In both cases stated above the student must be able to complete their course within their existing period of leave. If the student will not resume studies after 60 days the University may withdraw its sponsorship.

If you submit a request for an interruption, which will lead to the University withdrawing its sponsorship of your Tier 4/Student visa, you will be advised of this before the interruption is approved.

If the University continues to sponsor your visa during a period of interruption, you can remain in the UK and your Tier 4/Student visa will continue to be valid. You should however be aware of the following:

- The restrictions on work that apply during term time also apply during a period of interruption. Therefore, if your visa allows you to work up to 20 hours per week during term time and you choose to remain in the UK during a period of interruption, you must not work more than 20 hours per week.
- If you have taken a period of interruption of 60 days or less, the University will not continue to sponsor your visa if you request a further interruption less than 2 months after you return to studies.
- If the University continues to sponsor you during a period of interruption, we are required to maintain contact with you during this period. You must respond to all contacts (e.g. by email) from the University while you are on interruption.
- The Home Office puts a cap on the number of years that students on Tier 4/Student visas are able to stay in the UK.

  The new rules are:

There are restrictions to the amount of time you can study in the UK with a Student visa. There are also rules around studying at the same level with a Student visa. You should read this section carefully.

Courses below degree level (RQF 4- 5) (FdSc programmes)

Students using a Student Route visa are allowed to study courses below degree level in the UK for up to two years.

Courses at degree level and above (RQF6) (BSc (Hons) programmes)

Undergraduate degree level

Students using a Student Route visa are allowed to study courses at degree level for no more than 5 years unless they are studying on an exempt subject.

There are some further limited exceptions to the five-year limit at degree level.

Postgraduate degree level (RQF 7-8) (Master Taught and Research degrees)

There is no time limit on study at postgraduate degree level and above.

Working during your studies

The maximum hours you can work during term-time are normally printed on your visa sticker or Biometric Residence Permit (BRP), and will depend mainly on when you made your most recent immigration application. For e-visas it will be stated on the details of your e-Visa.

Please note, **if you are in receipt of an Award, Scholarship or Fellowship** (Commonwealth Shared Scholarship, African Land and Food, etc.) **you may have further restrictions regarding taking paid work during your studies in the UK irrespective of what your Visa states**. Breaking the conditions of your award may mean that you are in breach of the conditions you have signed with the awarding body, which may put your status and scholarship/fellowship/award at risk. If you are not certain please contact the Visa Compliance Office.

If you withdraw from your programme or interrupt your studies, you are not entitled to work regardless of when your Tier 4/Student visa in the UK ends.

Please ensure that you do not breach the conditions set in your visa as you will be committing an Immigration Offence and you can face serious consequences. See below:

- Sent to court
- Fined
- Sent to prison for up to 6 months
- Deported from the UK

- Banned from returning to the UK from between 1-10 years. You would also have to declare this and your illegal working on future immigration applications to the UK and other countries.

Please note that if the University becomes aware that you are working illegally, we will be required to report this to the Home Office, which could put our sponsor license at risk.

The Home Office defines[1] a working week as a seven-day period starting on a Monday. This means that, during term-time, students on a Tier 4/Student visa are allowed to work a maximum of 10/20 hrs in the seven-day period from Monday to Sunday (max. hours allowed are stated on your BRP and vary depending on your course of study and the institution you are studying with).

Please see below table with term time and which periods are excluded from work restrictions.

TABLE OF OFFICIAL STUDY AND HOLIDAY TIME FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2026/27

STUDY LEVEL	Study Period	Period excluded from work hours restrictions on Tier 4 or Student visa
Undergraduate & Postgraduate PgDip	**Semester 1:** 28 September – 18 December 2026 & 11-17 January 2027 **Semester 2:** 18 January – 19 March 2027 & 5 April –21 May 2027	Christmas, Easter and Summer. For AY 2026/27 these are: • 19 Dec 2026 to 10 Jan 2027 (Christmas) • 20 March to 4 April 2027 (Easter) • 22 May to (start of semester 1 for next AY) Sep 2027 (Summer)
Postgraduate MSc	Semester 1 Semester 2 Summer Term (25/05 to 28/09/2026)	Christmas and Easter vacation. For AY 2026/27 these are: • 19 Dec 2026 to 10 Jan 2027 (Christmas) • 20 March to 4 April 2027 (Easter)
Postgraduate Research	1st October 2026 to 30th September 2027 **or** 1st Feb 2027 to 31st January 2028	PGR students must be studying for min. 46 weeks per academic year. Annual leave (up to max. 6 weeks in one Acad. Year) may be taken when appropriate and in line with your research and teaching events agreed and signed off by the Director of Research/PhD Supervisor.

[1] From 6th April 2017.

N.B. Exam weeks are also term-time

- **Semester 1 exam period: 11-17 January 2027**
- **Semester 2 exam period: 17-21 May 2027**

Work placements for students on a Tier 4/Student visa

You may undertake some work experience while you are studying. In many cases, this will be possible, but for non-EU/EEA/Swiss students there are restrictions on working in the UK.

Visa students are permitted to undertake a work placement as part of their degree programme providing:

- It is an assessed and integral part of your programme - this means that it should be part of the programme specification, and you should not be able to achieve the award without undergoing the placement. It is not more than 50% of the length of your programme, unless it is a statutory (legal) requirement
- You will remain enrolled as a student at the University (on a Leave of Absence) and will not take an interruption of studies

If the work placement meets these conditions, you are permitted to work full time using your student visa.

The University will report your work placement to the Home Office to inform them and your visa will remain valid. You must continue to abide by the conditions of your visa.

If the work placement does not meet those conditions, you will not be able to undergo the placement on a full time basis, during term time.

You must declare your Work Placement to the Visa Compliance Office by completing and returning the Internship/Placement Details form BEFORE a work placement starts.

Extracurricular work placements and internships

If you want to undertake a work placement or internship which is not an assessed and integral part of your studies, you may only undertake the placement/internship:

- Part time (up to 20 hours per week) during term time; and
- Full time during vacation periods

If you interrupt your studies to undertake a work placement or internship the University will withdraw its Tier 4/Student visa sponsorship and you will need to obtain a different type of immigration permission which will allow you to undertake work in the UK. You will need to apply for a new Tier 4 visa to return to your studies.

Work placements and internships outside of the UK

If your work placement is not in the UK you need to apply for a visa from the country where you will work, unless it is your home country.

If your placement is an assessed and integral part of your degree programme, your Tier 4/Student visa will remain valid.

If you take an interruption of studies to undergo the placement, the RAU will withdraw its sponsorship, your visa will be curtailed and you will need to get a new Student visa to return to studies.

Postgraduate research students

If you are studying a research degree it is unlikely that a work placement will form part of your programme. However, if the work placement that you wish to undertake forms an essential part of your research, you can still do the placement using your Tier 4/Student visa.

The University will make a report to the Home Office and inform them of your change of circumstances.

The work placement **must still meet all the conditions for a work placement under Tier 4/Student visa.**

Absence during your studies

The University has an obligation as a Student Visa educational sponsor to monitor and keep records of attendance of all international students.

A Tier 4/Student visa is issued for the purpose of full time in person study. The University understands that there will be times when you will need to be absent either because of unforeseen circumstances (bereavement, illness) or to undertake a period of study in another part of the UK or overseas (e.g. fieldwork or to work on your thesis or dissertation).

When you need to take a short break from your studies the University may approve a period of authorised absence to a maximum period of 60 days without withdrawing its Visa sponsorship. For absences in circumstances such as the ones described above Postgraduate Researchers (see below) need to complete and submit the form for *Reporting Period of Research Away from the University*.

Where you are continuing to engage with your programme of study during the period of authorised absence, the University may approve a period of absence longer than 60 days without withdrawing its Visa sponsorship. The University is obliged to continue monitoring your academic engagement and progress with your fieldwork, thesis or dissertation. Acceptable methods of contact with the university during such a period include email and skype communications with your course tutor or supervisor.

Reporting periods of research spent away from the University
The University is required to make a Change of Circumstances report to the Home Office when a student on Tier 4 /Student Visa changes their study location for a temporary period (4 weeks or longer) which is agreed by the Supervisor/School.

The activity reporting is required because the Royal Agricultural University continues to sponsor the student's visa and as such, the University has monitoring responsibilities.

The Change of Circumstances report notifies the Home Office of the temporary change of location of the student's study programme. The report benefits the student when they leave the UK and when they attempt to re-enter and return to the University as it explains their movements to the Home Office and the UKVI.

When you plan to leave the UK for the purpose of carrying out research (including fieldwork, split programme, writing-up of thesis and corrections) please ensure you have agreed this with your Supervisor and Academic department of study.

- Complete the required form(*Reporting periods of research away from the University* – provided in the appendix of this document)
- Obtain your Supervisor/Director of Research approval and signature
- Return the form to the Visa Compliance Office or via email to visas@rau.ac.uk

Valid Reasons for authorised absence

- To travel back to your home country due to an unexpected event (bereavement, emergency etc)
- Carry out fieldwork relating to your studies
- Attend a conference
- Take a holiday(postgraduate research students only)

Holiday

- Undergraduate/Postgraduate Taught students only – You are expected to attend all timetabled events relating to your course during term-time. A holiday request cannot be considered during these times. You are allowed to travel on holiday/social occasion during the University vacation time without authorisation from RAU.
- Postgraduate Taught students(MSc only) who will be working on their dissertations/research projects over the summer period will be expected to apply for an authorised absence if they want to take holiday during this time. **Working on your dissertation is term time**.
- Postgraduate researchers- supervision is expected to be carried out throughout the academic year (incl. July-August). Postgraduate research students may take up to 6 weeks holiday in each academic year, including public holidays with the prior agreement of their Supervisor or the Director of Research. Students are expected to utilise the Christmas and Easter breaks primarily for their leave.

If you plan to be away for the purpose of holiday you will need to complete a form for Authorised Absence at least 10 working days prior to your departure date.

If you have any questions regarding the information provided in this leaflet, please contact the Visa Compliance Office at visas@rau.ac.uk