The Rules Have Changed!
This is the tenth edition of Visa News. The aim of this short information sheet is to provide you with important information, advice and news on UK immigration rules. The Home Office recently introduced some changes to the UK Immigration Rules and some of these changes may affect our students.

Be prepared
Over the summer we will be offering document checking sessions for Tier 4 applications, and computer lab sessions to help you to complete your Tier 4 applications. These sessions are always very full, and are only offered on a limited basis. Please take advantage of the help that is offered as soon as possible, and do not wait until the last minute to make your Tier 4 application.

University Institutional Tier 4 Policy
The University has recently updated the Institutional Tier 4 Policy. It is very important that you understand the rules and responsibilities related to your Tier 4 visa. You can find a copy of the policy here: http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/stdserv/Institutional_T4_Sponsor_compliance_Policy.pdf

Helping Yourself
It is very important that you obey the terms and conditions of your visa, which will include doing things like:

- Provide the University with the originals of your passport and visa documentation (Biometric Residence Permit in order that copies can be taken.
- Keep your UK contact details up to date via the RISIS web portal (phone number, mobile phone number and address).
- Re-enrol for your course on time each academic year if applicable.
- Study whilst you are in the UK (ensuring that you meet the progression and attendance requirements of your course with no significant gaps or absences) and re-enrol for your course on time if applicable.
- Follow University processes if you wish to defer or suspend your studies or withdraw from your course.
- You should also make sure that you continue to retain a valid visa by extending or applying for a new visa before your current visa expires: If you become an overstayer, you will not be permitted to continue your studies or resume your studies until a new visa has been granted.

Lost Documents
Please take care to protect your passport and Visa/BRP when you are travelling abroad. If you lose your BRP or Visa while travelling, it can be a very expensive and time consuming process to replace your documents before you return to the UK. If you are outside the UK and lose your BRP, you will need to report the loss to the police, apply for a temporary travel visa to return to the UK and then apply to replace your BRP after you are back in the UK. Please contact us at immigration@reading.ac.uk if you are abroad and require assistance in replacing your documents.

Check your Visa is Correct
The rules concerning how to correct errors on Visa vignettes and BRPs, and how to respond to refusal have changed. There is only a very short window of time to request the corrections. If you think an error has been made then please visit the Immigration Advice team during walk-in times.

To check if your visa expiry date is correct as a general rule the Home Office gives the following extra length of leave:

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<th>Courses less than 6 months</th>
<th>Length of the course plus 7 days</th>
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<td>Pre-sessional courses less than 6 months</td>
<td>Length of the course plus 1 month</td>
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<td>Courses between 6-12 months</td>
<td>Length of the course plus 2 months</td>
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Right to Rent
The new rules about renting are now in place. All private landlords in England will have to check new tenants have the right to be in the UK before renting out their property. Under the new rules landlords who fail to do these checks could face penalties of up to £3000 per tenant. You will have to show that you have a right to rent property in England if you are starting a new tenancy or there is a break in your tenancy.

University landlord (or letting agent) must:
- check your original documents to show you have the right to stay in England and rent a property
- check the documents of any other adults living in the property
- make copies of your documents and keep them until you leave the property
- return your original documents to you once they’ve finished the check

If you have a limited right to stay in the UK, for example you are on a visa, your landlord will have to make a repeat check. Your landlord will ask to see your documents again just before your permission to stay runs out, or after 12 months, whichever is longer.

Academic Progression
In order to show academic progress in a Tier 4 (General) application, students must be doing a course which is a higher level than the previous course studied under Tier 4 (General) or ‘Student’ leave. There are exceptions for students studying at a UK recognised body or body in receipt of public funding as a HEI, if the sponsor is able to confirm that the new course is connected to, part of the same subject group as, or where the study involves deeper specialization of the previous course for which Tier 4 leave was granted; or where the previous course and the new course together support a student’s genuine career aspirations. Students who want to extend their leave to study at the same academic level must be studying at degree level or above and cannot study a course at a lower level than their previous course. Applicants in the following situations will not have to demonstrate academic progress:
- Applying to extend leave to complete a course after a period as a student union sabbatical office
- re-sitting an exam or repeating modules; or
- applying for leave to remain to complete a PhD or other doctoral qualification where this course was
studied under Tier 4 (General) or ‘Student’ leave; or
- Making a first immigration application to complete a course started at an institution which had its Tier 4 licence revoked.

You may be allowed to change course within the University if you meet the following conditions:
- The course you are switching to is at a higher degree level and not at a lower level than your previous course
- The new course can be completed within the period of time on your current visa
- You have been previously granted Tier 4 leave, and the University/Sponsor confirm that the course is related to your previous course, or the previous course and the new course in combination support your genuine career aspirations.

Time Limits
From the 6 April 2016 the Immigration Rules make it clear that all time you have previously been granted to study in the UK will count towards the time limits, even if you did not spend all of this time studying and/or you used this time to study a different level of course.

Below Degree Level: 2-year Cap
The cap only applies to students 18 years old and over. From your 18th birthday, as a Tier 4 (General) student you can study courses that lead to a qualification below degree-level for a maximum of two years.

Degree level: 5-year cap
Any new Tier 4 application must lead to you spending no more than five years on courses at degree level. For Tier 4 applications made since 10 August 2015, all the time you have had leave under Tier 4 (or as a pre-Tier 4 student) counts towards the 5 years, including the short extra time you are given before the course (maximum one month) and after a course (maximum four months). There are some exceptions to the 5-year cap:
- If you have successfully completed a UK degree course which was at least four years long, and you are making a Tier 4 application to study a Master’s degree at a higher education institution (recognised body or institution in receipt of public funding), the limit is six years.
- if your Tier 4 application is to study a PhD (or one of the postgraduate research qualifications listed in Annex 5 of the Home Office's Tier 4 policy guidance).
- If you have already completed a PhD (or one of the postgraduate research qualifications listed in Annex 5 of the Home Office’s Tier 4 policy guidance) in the UK, any new Tier 4 application is subject to an 8-year limit (including courses below degree level, but not including Tier 4 leave granted under the Doctorate Extension Scheme).
- If you are applying to study on or continue a course in architecture, medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and science, or music at a conservatoire, this period of study will be exempt from the limit.
- If you have completed a UK degree, and your current Tier 4 application is to study certain legal qualifications, some of these qualifications will not be counted towards the time-limit cap. If you think this may apply to you, please contact an advisor for clarification. It is unlikely that the Home Office will grant further leave to someone whose current Tier 4 application means they will exceed these limits, unless there are “compelling and compassionate circumstances”, such as injury or disability.
- If you need to suspend from your studies, or if you fail your course you need to be aware that these situations could have an impact on your ability to apply for a new visa or to finish your course within the time limits allowed. The amount of time on your visa for your suspended/failed course could still be counted towards the time limits for study in the UK, and you could be required to attend a credibility interview if you need to apply for a Tier 4 visa in the future.

Applying to extend your visa in the UK
Only Tier 4 (General) students who have, or who have last, been sponsored by a UK recognised body or body in receipt of public funding as a HEI, or an overseas HEI if you are on a short-term study-abroad programme in the UK, or an embedded college will be allowed to apply for a Tier 4 (General) from within the UK. All other students will need to return to the country of residence to make a Tier 4 (General) application.

New Immigration Changes

The application fee for a Tier 4 application has increased to £448 for an in-country postal application, and to £948 for an in-country in-person application.

Established presence no longer exists, and if you are making a new Tier 4 application you will be required to show you have enough monthly maintenance to cover nine months of costs, or the length of your course, whichever is less. For a year-long course, you will need to show nine months at £1015 a month, for a total of £9135. The only exception to this is if you are applying for Tier 4 leave as a student union sabbatical officer or under the Doctoral Extension Scheme, then you will only need to show two months of maintenance, or £2030.

The Home office has also clarified that students are not allowed to set-up businesses while on a Tier 4 visa, including when they are not the controlling shareholder.

Your visa application could also be refused if you have an outstanding debt for NHS treatment of £500 or more; or if you have been involved in a legal case with the Home Office and as a result you have been instructed to pay the Home Office’s legal costs, but you have failed to do so.

Further Advice
Further advice and information for international students can be found at www.ukcisa.org.uk. UKCISA operate a free telephone advice line for students; Monday – Friday 1300 - 1600 hours Outside the UK: +44 20 3131 3576

Need help?

Individual Visa Advice
The Immigration Advice Service Team can offer free immigration advice in the following ways:

Visa advice walk-in sessions on Monday and Tuesday 10.00am - 12.30pm and Wednesdays and Thursdays 1.30pm - 4.30pm

You can contact us by email at immigration@reading.ac.uk.
For up to date information visit our website at www.reading.ac.uk/student/international