

To: All international students

Date: 19 March 2020

Subject: COVID-19 outbreak: Important new advice for international students

Dear students,

I am writing as I know many of our international students are concerned about growing travel disruptions from the COVID-19 outbreak. You may wish to return home but are concerned about implications for exams in the summer term. We understand your worries and I hope the information in this email will help you to make decisions based on your individual circumstances.

We are working hard to prepare contingency arrangements for exams and we will share further information about this no later than Monday 23 March, but hopefully before. However, we understand that you may not be able to wait until these arrangements are confirmed before booking travel and making plans to return home.

I would therefore like to offer reassurance that we will make every effort to allow you to take your exams wherever you are, and to progress or graduate, even if you are unable to return to the UK next term.

Since we have transitioned to online teaching, we are subject to different [UK Visa & Immigration office](#) (UKVI) guidance related to COVID-19. This means that, given the exceptional circumstances, Tier 4 sponsors (including the University of Reading) **do not need to report student absences** relating to COVID-19 in cases where **these have been authorised by the sponsor**.

We understand that you may wish to return home. Now that we are providing teaching and library materials online for the rest of the term, any absence due to the outbreak will not be treated as unauthorised as long as you continue to engage with your studies using the online facilities provided.

The UKVI have also confirmed that we would not be required to withdraw Tier 4 sponsorship for students who cannot attend for more than 60 days due to these exceptional circumstances. This means we would not withdraw your sponsorship if you leave the UK as long as you continue to engage in your studies online or have been given an authorised absence.

If you choose to return home, or if you have already done so, **you must let us know** using the [online departure form](#) so we can make a formal record that your absence is authorised.

We have provided answers to further queries below. Please read this carefully and contact us at immigration@reading.ac.uk if you have any questions.

Finally, I understand this will be a very difficult time for you and your families. We are here to offer advice and support so please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any queries.

Kind Regards,

Katie Robertson

Head of International Student Advisory Team & Home Office Compliance, International Student Advisory Team

University of Reading

Q: If I return to my home country and continue to study my programme using the online materials, will my Tier 4 visa be affected?

A. No, the University will continue to sponsor your Tier 4 visa during this period. We expect you to continue to engage with any learning and assessments which are provided online. If you leave the UK or have left already, you should complete the [online departure form](#).

Q. Can I choose to stay in the UK and study from my accommodation?

A. Yes, you are welcome to stay in the UK and continue your studies online during the period the University are putting in these special measures.

Q. If I stay in the UK, can I still work?

A. There are no changes to your work (employment) permissions. Tier 4 students will continue to be restricted during term time, as you will be expected to be working on your studies. Term times remain the same at this time. Students are only permitted to work more than the hours started on their Tier 4 visas in the following periods:

Undergraduates

Easter Vacation: Monday 30 March to Sunday 19 April

Summer Vacation: Monday 15 June to Sunday 27 September

Postgraduate Taught (master's)

Easter Vacation: Monday 30 March to Sunday 19 April

After this date, students are considered to be in term time until the end of their programme as confirmed on their CAS. For the majority of students this will be 23 September 2020.

Postgraduate Research

Continue to be in term time other than approved full week periods of annual leave. Please refer to the Doctoral Research Office for further information if required.

Q. How will the University monitor my engagement as required under Tier 4?

A. We are currently putting plans in place to monitor engagement. This may include student engagement with Blackboard and/or online submission of work and assessments. If virtual meetings are taking place, for example Skype meetings or telephone interactions with project tutors/supervisors, these could also be used.

Q. I do not wish to continue my studies at this time and wish to suspend or withdraw from my programme.

A. If you are not continuing with your current programme then the normal processes apply. You will need to contact your [Support Centre](#) and complete the appropriate paperwork to suspend or withdraw from your programme. The University is then required to inform the Home Office of this

and withdraw sponsorship for the Tier 4 visa. The University will confirm by email to you when this have been done and provide you with advice on how long you have to leave the UK.

Q. If I have finished all my work, dissertation or project work can I leave the UK and go home?

A. Yes, you can leave the UK and go home. You do not have to wait until you have finished your work if you wish to write up or work from your home country. If you leave before the end date of your programme, you should complete the [online departure form](#).

Q. I am in my final year and due to graduate this summer, I am worried that any delays could affect my visa and next visa application?

A. At present the summer 2020 graduation ceremonies are still scheduled to take place on 14-17 July 2020. However, if the situation changes, students who have completed their degree and need to make a new application for a new programme can use their transcripts showing their final marks as evidence to apply for a new programme or UK visa.

Q. If I remain in the UK, can I access health care?

A. Yes, the Immigration Health Surcharge paid as part of a Tier 4 visa application gives you access to the UK health care system in the same way as a British Citizen.

Q. I have not registered with a GP, is it too late and what should I do if concerned about getting healthcare?

A. No, you can still register with a GP. Please see information on our [website](#) for more information on how to do this. If you have not registered with a GP you can still access emergency and non-emergency healthcare. If you have a non-urgent health issue, you can refer to the [NHS 111 online](#) system. Alternatively, you can call 111. In an emergency you should call 999. An emergency is when someone is seriously ill or injured, or their life is at risk. Other than this, you should refer to NHS 111 or your GP.