

Student visa: Academic Progression and Course Changes

1. Scope and purpose

1.1 This procedure outlines the University's procedure on academic progression and change of courses for sponsored Students (formerly Tier 4). It applies to applicants and current students of the University requiring Student sponsorship.

1.2 The academic progression rule is in place to ensure students are progressing academically if they wish to study a further course in the UK, and are not merely seeking to extend their stay in the UK.

1.3 All University staff are expected to comply with this procedure. Failure to comply will result in compliance action against the University by UK Visas & Immigration (UKVI). Current and prospective students are at risk of having visas refused should we operate outside of this procedure. Refusals will negatively impact a student's immigration history and the University may be held liable for costs associated with an unsuccessful visa application in the result of the University operating outside this procedure.

1.4 This procedure is specific to the University of Kent and does not represent a full statement of immigration or Student sponsor requirements. This procedure is subject to change and the University is entitled to review its policies and procedures relating to compliance with its Student sponsor duties at any time. The University is under no legal obligation to sponsor any individual and exercises caution with respect to sponsoring students to not risk its status as a Student sponsor and to not put any student at risk of a visa refusal.

2. Academic progression

2.1 All Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) are assigned in accordance with both this procedure and the University's Student Sponsorship and CAS Issuing Procedure. In order to be considered for a CAS all students must meet academic progression requirements as set out in this document unless exempt as defined in UKVI policy guidance. A student can only demonstrate academic progression if they have successfully completed their previous course.

2.2 To demonstrate academic progression, a new course for which a sponsored Student wishes to study must be above the level of the previous course for which the student was last given Student/Tier 4 permission except as permitted in section 3 of this procedure.

2.3. A student does not need to show academic progression if:

- a. they are making a Child Student application in the UK or overseas;
- b. they are making their first Student application;
- c. they are making a Student application overseas;
- d. they are making a first application to move to a new institution to complete an existing course commenced at a Student sponsor that had its licence revoked (including Tier 4);
- e. they are applying to resit an examination, repeat a course module or repeat an academic year, or they have previously re-sat examinations, repeated modules or repeated an academic year and require leave to remain to complete the course in respect of which those examinations were re-sat, modules repeated or academic year repeated;
- f. they are applying to complete the PhD or other doctoral qualification for which study was undertaken in the last grant of permission under the Student route (including Tier 4), in the UK or overseas;
- g. they are applying to undertake a role as a Student Union Sabbatical Officer, or to complete the qualification for which they were last granted permission as a Student (including Tier 4) after a period as a Student Union Sabbatical Officer;
- h. they are applying as a postgraduate doctor or dentist on a recognised Foundation Programme; or i. they are applying for permission to stay in order to undertake a study abroad programme or work placement or they have previously completed a study abroad programme or work placement and require a further period of permission to complete their course.
- j. they are undertaking an integrated masters or PhD programme and are continuing to study their course but at the level of the lower level qualification (for example, an integrated masters student continuing on the bachelors programme)

2.4 The University will not issue a CAS where the new course is at a lower level than the previous course, as it will not represent academic progression and any associated visa application will automatically be refused. This includes students studying a substantive course who wish to undertake a pre-sessional English course before another substantive course.

2.5 In order to demonstrate academic progression a student must have either successfully completed the course for which they were last granted Student/Tier 4 permission, or if they have changed courses within the University, the course they have changed to. The definition of 'successfully completed the course' refers to achieving the qualification for which a student was studying.

2.6 To demonstrate a student has successfully completed a course the University will require the student to present their formal award or a formal written letter on headed paper from their

current Student sponsor confirming the course has been successfully completed. The University will not accept letters which speculate a student will successfully complete a course. For example, we would not accept a letter for a student currently studying a postgraduate taught course that states they have submitted their thesis. We would expect for the thesis to have been examined and the qualification approved by a board.

2.7 Any student who has not successfully completed their course will not demonstrate academic progression.

3. Students studying at the same level

3.1 The University may exceptionally consider academic progression to be demonstrated where a student wishes to study a new course at the same level as the previous course for which a student was granted Student/Tier 4 permission, if the course is at degree level or above and:

- The new course is related to the previous course for which the student was given Student/Tier 4 permission (meaning it is either connected to the previous course, part of the same subject group or involves deeper specialisation); or
- The student's previous course and new course combined support the student's genuine career aspirations.

3.2 To fulfil the requirements of paragraph 3.1, first bullet point, of this procedure, the Admissions CAS Team or Student Immigration Compliance Team will consult with relevant academics within the School, in complex cases, to confirm the new and previous course are connected, part of the same subject group or involve deeper specialisation. For straightforward cases (e.g. new course is BA in Economics, previous course is BA in Economics and Spanish) the Admissions CAS Team or Student Immigration Compliance Team will assess academic progression.

3.3 To fulfil the requirements of paragraph 3.1 of this procedure, the University will require a student to provide a statement justifying their reasons for choosing the new course, outlining how the previous and new course combined support their genuine career aspirations. The University may ask for evidence, including but not limited to previous job applications, work experience, employer statements, or job postings, to support any such claim.

Version	Effective Date	Activity	Previous Version
1.0	12/02/2019	Initial version	N/A
2.0	19/12/2022	Updated by Student Immigration Compliance Manager	1.0
3.0	02/01/2025	Updated by Student Immigration Compliance Manager	2.0