



Home Office

# Covid-19: Guidance for Student sponsors, migrants and Short-term students

## Temporary concessions in response to Covid-19

Version 12/2022 - This guidance is to be used from 25/02/2022

This guidance covers temporary concessions for:

- Student sponsors
- Students and Child Students (including Tier 4)
- Graduate route
- Short-term Student (English Language) migrants (including Short-term Students)

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## 1. About this guidance

- 1.1 The Home Office and its Ministers are very clear that no one will have a negative outcome through the immigration system due to a circumstance that was beyond their control.
- 1.2 Where this guidance refers to 'Student' it should be read as meaning those with permission as a Student, Child Student, or Tier 4 migrant unless the contrary intention appears. This guidance sets out temporary policy concessions for Student sponsors, and people in the UK with permission as a Student, Child Student, Tier 4 migrant, Short-term Student (English Language) or Short-term Student, in response to the outbreak of Covid-19.
- 1.3 The concessions will all be kept under regular review and will be withdrawn once the situation returns to normal. There is no intention for any further extension to any concession end dates stated in this guidance. Therefore where a concession is given an end date, sponsors and students will be expected to revert to non-concessionary policy after that date.
- 1.4 For Student sponsors, this guidance must be read alongside the [Student Sponsor Guidance](#), which sets out the requirements for education providers wishing to apply for, and hold, a licence to sponsor international students to come to the UK under the Student and Child Student routes. Document 1 covers applying for a Student sponsor licence, Document 2 covers sponsorship duties, Document 3 covers compliance assessments and sanctions for non-compliance, and Document 4 covers the effect of Higher Education regulatory reform on Student sponsors. Sponsors, and education providers who would like to apply for a Student sponsor licence, should read all four documents and ensure they understand them and comply with them.
- 1.5 For those with permission as a Student or as a Child Student, this guidance must be read alongside the [Immigration Rules](#), in particular [Appendix Student](#) and [Appendix Child Student](#) and the [Student route guidance](#). Students who commenced study under the Tier 4 (General) or Tier 4 (Child) routes should refer to their conditions of leave.
- 1.6 For Short-term Student (English Language) migrants, this guidance must be read alongside the [Short-term study guidance](#) and [Appendix Short-term Student \(English Language\)](#). The Short-term study rules prior to 1 December 2020 are available for reference in the [Immigration Rules archive](#).
- 1.7 An index of the Covid-19 guidance published on the GOV.UK website for sponsors and migrants is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-immigration-and-borders>. You should regularly check this page for any updates.
- 1.8 Additional guidance and information is available on GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>.

## Coronavirus immigration help centre

- 1.9 If you have immigration queries related to coronavirus, please email the Coronavirus Immigration Help Centre. Email: [CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk). Your email must be in English.

### Publication

Below is information on when this guidance was published:

- Version: 12.0
- Published on 25 February 2022

## Changes since last publication

Current paragraph number	Previous paragraph number	Changes made
2.11	2.11	End dates for transition from distance learning updated to 30 June 2022
2.16	N/A	A new paragraph added to confirm concessions on distance and blended learning will be permitted if there is a local restriction anywhere in each of the four nations of the UK which prohibits in-person teaching and that this concession will be permitted in line with the duration of any such restrictions.
2.17	2.17	Updated to reflect the change to distance learning concessions in 2.16. Blended learning concession end date updated to 30 June 2022.
2.19	2.19	End date updated to 30 June 2022.
3.2	3.2	Commencement of in person/blended learning end date updated to 30 June 2022.
3.5	3.5	End date for blended learning updated to 30 June 2022.
3.10	3.9	Correction to police registration concession to clarify that this applies to both permission to stay and permission to enter.
3.12	3.12	“Directly” added to working hours exemption for migrants employed by the NHS.
3.25	3.25	Commencement of in person/blended learning end date updated to 30 June 2022.
3.27	3.27	Dates for commencement of in person/blended learning, permission end date and UK entry date updated to 30 June 2022.

## 2. Student Sponsors

This section gives information on:

- Educational Oversight
- Student absences related to Covid-19
- Distance learning
- Basic Compliance Assessment
- Attendance monitoring
- Validity of CAS which have already been issued
- Original documents
- English language requirements and pre-sessional courses
- Commencing studies
- Right to work checks
- Child Students

### Educational Oversight

- 2.1 Student sponsors are required to maintain Educational Oversight (EO) throughout the period of their licence. For private education providers, this operates on a 4 year inspection cycle, with annual interim health checks. Providers which are subject to statutory inspections, for example by Ofsted, are inspected on a cycle determined by their statutory inspection body. All these inspection cycles will be affected and potentially delayed by restrictions on physical inspection visits during the Covid-19 outbreak.
- 2.2 Unless the Home Office already has serious concerns about a sponsor, for example based on evidence of current non-compliance or failings in EO, we will take a pragmatic approach and allow inspection bodies to utilise other inspection methods such as desk-based assessments and virtual meetings, with the methods to be determined by the inspecting body.
- 2.3 We will also adopt a flexible approach to unavoidable delays in inspection caused by the Covid-19 outbreak. We will not reduce a sponsor's Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) allocation to zero due to delays for this reason, on the expectation that any delayed interim reviews or full inspections will be conducted as soon as possible. Sponsors must keep a record of any communications from their EO body about cancelled, delayed or desk-based inspections. As restrictions are lifted and physical inspections are allowed to resume, inspection bodies are expected to return to that model when it is safe to do so, in accordance with Government guidance. Decisions on when to resume physical inspections will be taken by inspecting bodies.

### Record keeping and CAS sponsor notes

- 2.4 If a temporary concession in this guidance will apply to a Student sponsor's duties regarding sponsored students, the sponsor must keep a record of this in the file of each sponsored student affected.

- 2.5 If a sponsor is issuing a CAS to a student on the basis of a temporary concession, this must be noted in either the CAS evidence or sponsor notes section.

## **Student absences related to Covid-19**

- 2.6 We will not take enforcement action against sponsors who continue to sponsor students who are absent from their studies due to Covid-19.
- 2.7 Sponsors do not need to report student absences related to Covid-19. This can include absences due to illness, students' need to isolate or their inability to travel due to travel restrictions.
- 2.8 Sponsors must maintain records of students who are absent for these reasons.
- 2.9 If a student has permanently withdrawn from their studies, did not enrol on their course after being granted permission by UKVI, or deferred their studies for reasons unrelated to Covid-19, sponsors must report this as usual.

## **Distance learning**

- 2.10 Distance learning is learning that takes place entirely remotely, without any face-to-face teaching or research activities on the sponsor's sites.
- 2.11 Sponsors are not required to withdraw sponsorship if an existing student is unable to return to the UK due to travel restrictions. Institutions can continue to provide distance learning for their existing sponsored students who are outside the UK, who will transition to face-to-face or blended learning in the UK before 30 June 2022. Sponsors can also commence sponsoring new Students and Child Students who will start studying through distance learning from overseas in the 2021-22 academic year, provided they transition to face-to-face learning when they arrive in the UK, which must be no later than by 30 June 2022.
- 2.12 Sponsors do not need to withdraw sponsorship for new students who have been issued permission under the Student or Child Student routes but are undertaking distance learning because they have been unable to travel to the UK. If a student stops engaging with their distance learning for more than 30 days their sponsor must withdraw sponsorship.
- 2.13 Where a student is continuing their studies via distance learning overseas or blended learning within the UK, when permitted, sponsors do not need to report this as a change of student circumstances.
- 2.14 New international students who have not yet applied for a visa, but want to start a course which they intend to begin overseas by distance learning before travelling to the UK to transition to face-to-face or blended learning, must be issued a CAS and obtain permission under the Student or Child Student route before travelling. The course start date on the CAS can either state the date

on which the course commences by distance learning or the date on which the applicant intends to commence learning in the UK. It is at the discretion of the sponsor which course start date is used, and either will be acceptable. The period of permission granted will be calculated based on the course dates on the CAS.

- 2.15 New international students who have not yet applied for permission on the Student or Child Student routes but want to start a course which will wholly be studied overseas by distance learning, do not require sponsorship under the Student or Child Student routes. This is because they do not need to travel to the UK.
- 2.16 If local social distancing restrictions in any of the four nations of the UK prohibit in-person teaching or on-campus attendance, distance learning will be permitted for students studying at a sponsor in that part of the UK in line with the duration of those restrictions. Distance learning will also be permitted if guidance issued by Government strongly recommends avoiding social mixing in an educational setting, but this is not enforced by rules.

## Blended Learning

- 2.17 Blended learning requires students to be physically in the UK at least some of the time to attend their studies in person, whilst undertaking some study elements online. Student sponsors are permitted to adopt a blended learning approach for students who are studying in the UK until 30 June 2022. Unless restrictions or guidance meeting the criteria at 2.16 applies, sponsors will not be able to provide tuition which is delivered entirely remotely to students who are undertaking their studies within the UK, there must be some face-to-face learning as specified in 2.18.
- 2.18 Sponsors must have face-to-face contact with sponsored Students who are doing blended learning in the UK at least twice per month during term time, on a rolling four-week basis, unless less frequent contact is already permitted under the academic engagement policy set out in the sponsor guidance (for example engagement permitted under Band 3).

## 15 hours of study requirement

- 2.19 Students studying courses below degree level via distance or blended learning are required to undertake 15 hours of study per week from 27 September 2021. When studying overseas, there must be 15 hours study by distance learning per week. For those in the UK studying by blended learning, the online element of study will count towards the 15 hours. Sponsors must ensure as far as possible that students are genuinely attending the online elements of study, rather than for example just logging in with a device whilst engaging in other activity. CAS which have been issued under a concession before the date on which it is amended or withdrawn will be honoured. This distance learning concession will be in place until 30 June 2022.

## Academic Engagement

- 2.20 Students who are commencing or continuing studies overseas via distance learning, and will therefore not meet requirements for recording physical contact points under a sponsor's duty to monitor attendance, do not need to be reported for missing expected face-to-face contact points.
- 2.21 Where a student is studying by distance learning, where possible sponsors should use expected online contact points such as logging into online learning portals, attending virtual lectures and tutorials, and online submission of coursework to monitor engagement. The Home Office will not take action against sponsors who are unable to monitor online contact points due to practical or technical limitations. As stated in paragraph 2.6 – 2.9, sponsors are not required to withdraw sponsorship when students are absent from studies, including online studies, due to Covid-19. If a student has stopped attending their online studies for other reasons, or failed to enrol on their course, the normal attendance monitoring policy applies to online learning.
- 2.22 Where a student is studying by blended learning in the UK, the sponsor must monitor a student's attendance at expected physical contact points as usual, and report a student where the student fails to engage with the course or attend the required contact points.
- 2.23 In exceptional circumstances, a sponsor can continue to sponsor a student who has deferred their studies for a period exceeding 60 days under the provisions in Document 2 of the [Student sponsor guidance](#), paragraph 7.5(f). For example, a sponsor is able to defer a student in excess of 60 days if the practical nature of the course means that teaching has not been able to take place due to Covid-19.

## Basic Compliance Assessment

- 2.24 Students who withdraw from their studies as a result of Covid-19 will be discounted from a sponsor's data in future Basic Compliance Assessments. Sponsors must notify UKVI of the reason for withdrawal and keep their own records of such cases. Students who withdraw from their studies for reasons other than Covid-19 will continue to be counted for the purpose of the sponsor's Basic Compliance Assessment.

## Validity of CAS which have already been issued

- 2.25 Where a CAS was issued between 24 January and 31 December 2020, Student and Child Student applications can still be made using CAS that were previously issued. The start date for the course may now be later than that stated on the CAS for the original course or the CAS may have expired. The Home Office will take a pragmatic approach to considering applications to study courses with significantly different start dates to those stated on CAS or expired CAS.

- 2.26 Where the course date has changed, if the CAS is not marked as 'used' or 'expired' and is showing as 'assigned', sponsors must update the new course start date (if known) in the sponsor notes field. The information on the CAS will then be considered as normal when the case is decided.
- 2.27 Where a CAS issued between 24 January and 31 December 2020 has become invalid because it has expired, or was marked as 'used' in an application and the student was unable to travel due to Covid-19, the Home Office will consider exceptionally accepting that CAS with a new visa application on a case by case basis. The CAS will be accepted if the caseworker is satisfied that the reason the applicant couldn't previously use it in an application or travel to the UK was due to Covid-19.

## Original documents

- 2.28 Student sponsors are required to see certain documents from students and keep records as set out in [Appendix D](#). Where it is no longer practical or safe for a student to submit these documents in person, or where sponsor sites are closed due to Covid-19 social distancing measures, it is acceptable for a digital copy such as a scan or photograph to be provided and kept on file.

## English language requirements and pre-sessional courses

- 2.29 Many English Testing Centres have now resumed services. Sponsors can visit the [International English Language Testing System \(IELTS\)'s website](#), the [Pearson Test of English website](#) or the [LanguageCert website](#), or contact the relevant test centre for more information. There is a [list of approved test centres](#) on the GOV.UK website. Students who would ordinarily be required to obtain a SELT must do so.

## Commencing studies

- 2.30 The Home Office will permit new students who are applying to switch into the Student or Child Student routes in the UK to commence study ahead of their application being decided if:
- They are studying with a Student sponsor other than a zero CAS sponsor
  - The Student sponsor has assigned a CAS
  - The course start date was on or before 30 June 2021
  - The applicant has submitted an in-time application and has provided the sponsor with confirmation of that
  - The applicant has a valid ATAS certificate if [required](#) for their course of studies
- 2.31 The conditions for allowing the applicant to commence studying in these circumstances are:
- The course must be that specified on the CAS
  - The sponsor's reporting duties for the individual commence from the date the CAS is issued– not the date the application is granted

- The sponsor agrees that they will end their sponsorship and teaching of the applicant if the Home Office ultimately rejects as invalid or refuses the application

## Right to work checks

- 2.32 Right to work checks are a requirement on employers to make sure a job applicant is allowed to work in the UK before employing them.
- 2.33 Right to work checks have been adapted to make it easier for employers to carry them out during the Covid-19 outbreak. More information can be found [here](#).

## Child Students

- 2.34 Any sponsor which is currently sponsoring a Child Student (aged under 18) has a continuing duty of care to that Child Student (including Tier 4 Child students), even if they have stopped studying, while the child remains under its sponsorship and is in the UK. The child safeguarding duties set out in Document 2 of the [Student sponsor guidance](#) continue to apply.

## 3. Students and Child Students

This section gives information on:

- Distance and blended learning
- Applying for permission to stay under the Student and Child Student routes.
- Police registration
- Working hours
- Right to rent checks
- Graduate route

### Distance and blended learning

- 3.1 Students and Child Students are not normally permitted to undertake distance or blended learning courses. However, due to the current exceptional circumstances, we will not consider it a breach of sponsor duties to offer distance learning to students outside the UK (including students who commenced study in person before returning overseas to continue studying) or blended learning to students in the UK.
- 3.2 New international students who have been granted permission under the Student or Child Student routes but have been unable to travel to the UK are permitted to undertake distance learning and sponsorship does not need to be withdrawn. Such students must travel to the UK to commence their studies in person as soon as is practicable and by 30 June 2022 at the latest.
- 3.3 New international students who have not yet applied for permission under the Student or Child Student routes but want to start a course which they intend to begin overseas by distance learning, before travelling to the UK to transition to face-to-face learning, must be sponsored and be granted permission under the Student or Child Student routes before travelling. They may either apply for permission on the Student or Child Student route before their course starts or before they travel to the UK, either is acceptable.
- 3.4 New international students outside the UK who have not yet applied for a visa but wish to commence a course by distance learning from outside the UK and who do not intend to travel to the UK to transition to face-to-face learning, do not require sponsorship under the Student or Child Student routes.
- 3.5 International students in the UK can also continue existing courses or commence new courses of study by blended learning. From 27 September 2021 until 30 June 2022 blended learning, where some study is undertaken in person and some study is undertaken remotely, will be permitted. Sponsors must provide some study in-person and are not permitted to provide all tuition remotely. Students will be expected to have a minimum of two face-to-face interactions per rolling four-week period during term time unless less frequent contact is already permitted for that type of course under the academic engagement policy set out in Document 2 of the Student sponsor guidance.

## Applying for Permission on the Student and Child Student routes

- 3.6 To be granted further permission to complete an existing course, or to begin a new course, students must still meet all other requirements of the Student or Child Student routes, including academic progression and maintenance requirements if the applicant has been in the UK for less than one year with valid permission.
- 3.7 Students who need to make a new application, and would normally be unable to demonstrate academic progression because:
- their new course is at the same level as the previous one (the student must have successfully completed the previous course);
  - they had been undertaking an integrated Masters or PhD/MPhil but will be continuing with the lower level qualification and require more time to complete that course; or
  - they are studying below PhD level and require further time to complete their course and none of the exceptions to academic progress around resits and repeats apply

but who cannot travel overseas to make an application due to Covid-19, will be exempted from the academic progression requirement if the sponsor confirms on the CAS that the previous course and the new course in combination support the applicant's genuine career aspirations, or that more time is required to complete their current course under this concession. This concession will apply to courses with a start date before 27 September 2021.

- 3.8 Students who have successfully completed the lower level qualification of an integrated course can apply for permission to stay in the UK to undertake a new course at a higher academic level. For example, where a student has successfully completed a Bachelor's degree as part of an integrated Masters programme, they would then be able to apply for a Masters programme within the UK. This exception to academic progression for students completing the lower level qualification of an integrated programme has been formalised in Immigration Rules for the Student route.
- 3.9 Students applying to study a new course can commence study at the institution from the date of the application, provided they hold valid Student permission on the date of application as they would normally be able to. Students must obtain a valid ATAS certificate before they commence their studies, if one is required under [Appendix ATAS](#) for their course of studies. The sponsor must end their sponsorship and teaching of the applicant if the Home Office ultimately refuses the application.

## Police registration

- 3.10 Students who are required to register with the police as a condition of a grant of permission, or who need to notify the police of a change of circumstances,

should check with their local police force whether it is possible to register with them at this time. Where it is not possible, students must register with the police or update their information once social distancing measures are lifted.

- 3.11 Students who have already registered with the police and are making a new application in the UK should submit their Police Registration Certificate along with any other documents in support of their application as normal.

## Working hours

- 3.12 Students who have work rights and are employed directly by an NHS trust within any of the professions listed below, will not be restricted to 20 hours work per week during term time and may work without limit on the number of hours permitted for that NHS role:

- biochemist
- biological scientist
- dental practitioner
- health professional
- medical practitioner
- medical radiographer
- midwife
- nurse
- occupational therapist
- ophthalmologist
- paramedic
- pharmacist
- physiotherapist
- podiatrist
- psychologist
- social worker
- speech and language therapist
- therapy professional

- 3.13 Students with work rights whose sponsor suspends all study on their course as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak will be considered to be in vacation time and so will be permitted to work full-time during this period.

- 3.14 Where a Student sponsor is providing tuition to students in the UK by blended learning, their students will be considered to be within term-time and will be limited to the term-time work hours stated on their visa.

- 3.15 Where a student is working in excess of the hours usually permitted on their permission by being employed in a profession listed in 3.13, they must also continue to study unless their sponsor has suspended all teaching on the course of study. A student cannot change to permanently working full-time in

a listed profession, instead of studying, whilst remaining on Student visa, as the purpose of their stay in the UK has changed. Such a person should apply under the appropriate work route.

- 3.16 This is a temporary concession and guidance will be updated with an end date prior to the concession being withdrawn. Employers and students are advised to check guidance documents regularly to ensure they are complying with work conditions permitted for sponsored students.

## Time limits

- 3.17 The maximum period of time from the age of 18 that a student can be granted permission to study in the UK at or below degree level will remain the same. However, discretion may be applied by UKVI in future where any period of permission that would cause someone to exceed the limit will do so as a result of Covid-19. Under the Student route there is no time limit for those studying above degree level.

## Right to rent checks

- 3.18 The 'right to rent' scheme requires landlords to check that all tenants who occupy their properties have legal status to live in the UK.
- 3.19 Right to rent checks have been adapted to make it easier for landlords to carry them out during the Covid-19 outbreak. More information can be found [here](#).

## Graduate route

- 3.20 The Graduate route launched on 1 July 2021.
- 3.21 Students will normally be expected to undertake their studies in the UK to be eligible for the Graduate route. However, if students are required to continue their current studies or commence a new course by distance learning from overseas due to Covid-19, they will still be eligible to switch into the Graduate route if they meet the other requirements of the route and a concession applies.
- 3.22 In order to meet the requirements of the Graduate route, Students covered by 3.23 to 3.28 below will also need to:
- have successfully completed an eligible course at a higher education provider with a track record of compliance;
  - have existing permission for that course as a Student at the point of application; and
  - make their application in the UK
- 3.23 Students who began a course of 12 months or less in 2020 or Spring 2021 via

distance learning, and who had not previously entered the UK to study that course will be able to make a Graduate application if they made a successful Student visa application and arrived in the UK either before their visa ended or by 27 September 2021, whichever was sooner.

- 3.24 Students who began a course of 12 months or less in 2020 or 2021 who have existing permission as a Student to study that course, and who have already travelled to the UK during that period of permission, will be able to make a Graduate application as long as they are present in the UK before the end date of their permission.
- 3.25 Students who commence a course of 12 months or less in Autumn 2021 or Spring 2022 via distance learning from overseas must enter the UK no later than 30 June 2022 and complete that course of study in the UK with permission as a Student to be eligible for the Graduate Route. Students should travel once they are able to do so.
- 3.26 Students who would normally only be sponsored to study in the UK on the Student route for the last year of a longer course, such as those on articulated degree programmes, will be considered as being on a course of 12 months or less for the purpose of this requirement.
- 3.27 Students sponsored for a course lasting longer than 12 months will not be prevented from being eligible for the Graduate route as a result of any distance learning that took place either in the UK or overseas between the period of 24 January 2020 and 27 September 2021 or any distance learning which took place overseas between 27 September 2021 and 30 June 2022. If a Student's current permission expires prior to 30 June 2022, they must enter the UK prior to the expiry of their Student permission rather than 30 June 2022.

## 4. Short-term student (English Language)

This section gives information on:

- Extending Short-term Student (English Language) permission in the UK
- Extending Short-term Study permission in the UK

### Extending Short-term study leave in the UK

- 4.1 There is no provision in the immigration rules to make an in country application to extend permission in the Short-term Student (English Language) category or apply for a further period of Short-term Student (English Language) permission from within the UK.
- 4.2 From 1 December 2020, Short-term study of up to six months was incorporated into the Visit route as a permitted activity. There is no provision in the immigration rules to extend permission as a Visitor when coming to study (this includes Short-term Study of up to six months).

## 5. Additional information on closure of Visa Application Centres (VAC) and Secure English Language Test (SELT) providers overseas

The majority of Visa Application Centres (VACs) have resumed services where local restrictions allow.

For updates to the status of VACs in your country check with:

- [TLS contact](#) if you're in Europe, Africa and parts of the Middle East
- [VFS global](#) for all other countries

Ongoing global restrictions mean some UKVI services will remain closed. Where services are resuming, existing customers will be contacted. Where the VAC in a country remains closed, applicants may be able to make applications from another VAC outside the UK. If an applicant requires permission to come to the UK to study a course, an applicant must obtain permission prior to travelling; applicants cannot travel as visitors and switch into the Student or Child Student routes in country.

Most English Testing Centres have also resumed services. [Visit the International English Language Testing System \(IELTS\)'s website](#), the [Pearson Test of English website](#) or the [LanguageCert website](#), or contact your test centre for more information on when they are reopening and how you can book your Secure English Language Test.