Monitoring Guidance Note for Schools
Tier 4 Students

This guidance aims to provide clarification on the monitoring procedures that need to be followed for members of our Tier 4 student population.

Students who are sponsored by the University on Tier 4 face monitoring requirements under the terms of their visa that are imposed by the Home Office. This requires us, as their Sponsor, to ensure our policy and processes comply with Home Office regulations to ensure both our Sponsor Licence is maintained and that our students’ visas are not put at risk.

We fully appreciate the complexity of Tier 4 and immigration regulations and we would actively encourage any staff member to contact the Tier 4 team in Registry Student Services (“the Tier 4 Team”) for clarification on how holding a Tier 4 visa impacts our students’ studies.

It is important to remember that providing “visa advice” is regulated by law and it is illegal to provide immigration advice unless expressly permitted in the relevant legislation.

The Tier 4 Team are happy to provide training, presentations and further support at all levels in Schools/Colleges.

You can contact the Tier 4 Team by calling (27)3505 or by emailing tier4@abdn.ac.uk

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August 2016 - Version 2
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Frequently Asked Questions

These are some of the questions that the Tier 4 Team get asked most frequently by staff across the University. If you have a question that is not answered in this guidance, contact details of the correct team to ask are at the end of this booklet.

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1. **What is the monitoring process?**

   The monitoring process is intended to ensure that our students are engaging with their programme and continue to make academic progress throughout their studies. It allows us to check that the learning outcomes of their programme are being achieved and that students are progressing in order to obtain their desired qualification.

   The monitoring process is not meant to be punitive and once a student has been formally reported though the monitoring process (“formally monitored”) there is still opportunity for this to be reversed; assuming the student can still meet the learning outcomes of the course/programme. The critical aspect at the heart of monitoring is ensuring that students have met the required learning outcomes and have put in the appropriate work and engagement to: be awarded the credits for that course; continue with their research; or achieve the final award of their programme.

   In addition to these academic considerations, Home Office regulations also require students holding a Tier 4 visa to be present on campus, engaging as a full-time student during their sponsorship. This guidance note, and the processes it outlines, hopes to balance these two needs.

2. **Who does the monitoring process apply to?**

   The University’s monitoring process applies to all our students, regardless of their immigration status. Details on the general policy can be found on [Staffnet](#). This Guidance Note outlines specific procedures that must be applied for our Tier 4 student population due to the additional considerations relating to their visa.

3. **Why does Tier 4 matter?**

   We support all our Tier 4 students by sponsoring their visa while studying with us in the UK. This sponsorship places extensive duties on the University to ensure, amongst other things, that the student is here in the city, actively engaging with their studies on our campuses and making academic progress towards their qualification.
It is important that all our Tier 4 students are meeting the terms of their visa, which itself is dictated by the programme they been sponsored for. Where a student is no longer following the terms of their visa, or studying on campus full-time without approval to be absent, we will likely need to withdraw the sponsorship of their visa as it is no longer being used for the purposes it was issued for. This determination is what drives the majority of decisions regarding our ongoing sponsorship of students on Tier 4: are they still using their visa as it was initially intended?

A Tier 4 visa is not an unrestricted right for a student to remain in, and travel to and from, the UK. If we cannot show that their visa is required for the reasons outlined in our offer of sponsorship, both the student and the institution can face strict action by the Home Office.

We can, at any time, be asked to provide a timeline of our Tier 4 student’s history with us, extending from the date of application through to graduation. This Tier 4 timeline is important as it allows us to demonstrate to the Home Office that we are meeting our obligations of Sponsorship. It is helpful to think of this Tier 4 timeline when reviewing this guidance and the importance of eliminating any gaps within it where a student’s circumstances cannot be clearly evidenced.

4. **Who is a Tier 4 student?**

Tier 4 is the main visa route used by International Students (those from outside the EU/EEA) to study in the UK. Tier 4 students make up the majority of our international student population, though it is important to note that not all international students will hold this type of visa.

The Tier 4 Team can confirm what immigration status a particular student has, and will provide lists to the Colleges each half session with details of students who hold a Tier 4 visa. We will also send out a monthly report showing our PGR students on Tier 4, as they can register with us throughout the Academic Year. This information is also held on the Student Records System ("SRS") under: Portals; Registration; Student Status Lookup; General Visa Information Tab.

5. **What do the Home Office view as appropriate attendance?**

For Tier 4 purposes, monitoring has two distinct concepts: physical presence on campus; and engagement and progression with studies.

The Home Office rules speak in terms of “expected contacts” that we have with the student. These rules equate to the University having to provide a minimum monitoring point every two weeks (actually every 10 working days) that students must meet. Where a student misses monitoring points without appropriate cause this will push them outside the Home Office tolerance for attendance and this must be reported through formal monitoring. Further details on this are outlined in the specific sections for UG, PGT and PGR students.

It is important to remember that a Tier 4 visa is issued only for full-time programmes, and Tier 4 visa holders are expected to be on campus on a full-time basis to complete their programme for it to remain valid. Exceptions to this, including PGR off-campus study, are outlined in the student specific sections.

Academic progression and engagement is more of a general concept and is viewed through a student’s interaction with their studies and their progression from one year, or stage, of study to another. Issues over progression or general lack of engagement can be raised with the Tier 4 team even if a student is attending classes and is physically present.
6. **What timeframes do the Tier 4 Team work to?**

We are required by law to report certain activity to the Home Office within 10 days of it occurring. It is, therefore, especially important that you act upon any request from a Tier 4 student relating to their studies, or a breach of student monitoring, quickly.

To ensure we meet this statutory timeframe it is important that all forms (including suspension and off-campus forms) are returned to Registry in advance of the intended activity so this can be factored into a decision relating to a students’ visa. Failure to submit such items on time, and in advance, may result in us having to take action against the student’s visa that could otherwise have been avoided.

7. **How do students know about the monitoring process?**

It is essential that all students are aware of the monitoring process during their studies (especially those on a taught course) as these apply regardless of immigration status. Information on monitoring should be stated in School/Course handbooks, or outlined to them at the start of their studies if a handbook is not provided. General guidance is also available for students on the Student Infohub website.

Please see [Staffnet](#) for more information on the general monitoring process and how it should be raised with students.

Tier 4 student guidance is also available on the [Infohub website](#), and is highlighted to Tier 4 students on the visa check card we give them each academic year.

The ultimate responsibility of ensuring students adhere to their visa conditions rests with them, but as their Sponsor we have a large part to play in ensuring they meet the requirements.

8. **When do our obligations to monitor Tier 4 students start?**

When sponsoring a student under Tier 4 we provide them with a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies number (CAS) as confirmation of our willingness to sponsor their visa. This CAS confirms a wealth of information to the Home Office about that student’s programme of study; including its academic level, course fees and on-campus duration. Our obligations relating to monitoring start on the students study start date as outlined in that CAS; which for most UG/PGT students is the start of term for each half session. PGR students start dates can vary and are shown on the SRS. It is, therefore, critically important that students who are delayed let us know and that Schools update the Tier 4 Team and Admissions with this information if received to them directly, so that we can ensure a note of this is made, updating this as appropriate to the Home Office.

9. **When do our obligations to monitor Tier 4 students stop?**

Our duties only stop when a student has formally completed their programme or they have had their status as a registered student removed. This could be through termination, withdrawal etc.

For individual courses the duty ends when a student has been removed from the course either through the awarding of a final grade or through withdrawal (voluntarily or by the application of formal monitoring).
If a student withdraws from study (or has their studies terminated by the University) monitoring can stop on the date this is processed through the Student Record System. You should continue to monitor them until such a point as you confirm with the Tier 4 Team that the student is no longer registered. Simply providing a student with a withdrawal from, or receiving an email form them indicating an intention to withdraw, does not end our duty to complete monitoring and this must be maintained until The Tier 4 Team have confirmed that the student’s studies have ended and the visa has been reported.

Given that the appeals process can, and indeed has, overturned decisions to terminate a student’s studies it is critical that monitoring is maintained throughout the appeal process. If the outcome is that the student’s appeal is not upheld, then monitoring can stop when the student is withdrawn on the system. If the student’s appeal is upheld, then monitoring will, of course, continue.

The above equally applies to students voluntarily leaving a course or appealing against a C7.

10. **What if a student is involved in an emergency or unexpected situation?**

You should contact the Tier 4 team as soon as you are alerted to any issue involving a Tier 4 student that impacts on their ability to maintain engagement with the University. Where a student faces an emergency (family situations, healthcare issues etc.) that may result in them missing an expected contact, it is important that we are alerted to ensure the correct approach is taken with a student’s visa. There are very few situations that we cannot work through with a student when we are involved at the outset.

11. **What if a student has questions about their visa?**

If a student has a question about their Tier 4 visa, including the restrictions placed on them as a Tier 4 visa holder; their ability to work in the UK; extending their visa; bringing family to the UK etc. please direct them to our International Student Advisers located in Student Support. They can be contacted on student.international@abdn.ac.uk

If the student wants to know more about their studies and how their Tier 4 visa impacts their ability to: take time away from their studies; go off-campus; suspend their studies; change their course or mode of study; and any other academic related query please direct them to the Tier 4 team on tier4@abdn.ac.uk

If the individual is not yet registered, and is still regarded as an applicant or prospective student, you should refer them to our Student Recruitment and Admissions Team on sras@abdn.ac.uk

12. **What if a student wants to change their programme or study mode?**

When we sponsor a Tier 4 Student, we outline in the CAS the programme that the student is coming to study. It is very difficult to change this programme once the student has commenced their programme and these situations should be discussed with the Tier 4 Team as they arise to assess if this is possible.

Students on Tier 4 visas can only be full-time and any request to move to part-time study (or move to a distance learning option) will result in the sponsorship of their visa being withdrawn.
Formal Monitoring Using the C6/C7 process

All Tier 4 students should be monitored using the same monitoring system – namely the use of the C6/C7 process on the SRS. Formal monitoring raises an alert to both the student concerned and Registry that there are issues over the student’s engagement. This ensures that a formal process is initiated and that students are treated fairly and consistently across the institution.

Regardless of the student’s level (UG, PGT or PGR) the C6 should be inserted against the appropriate course in which the student has breached the monitoring procedure (outlined at the sections specific to UG, PGT and PGR students). For PGR students this can be placed against the course code on their student record.

To insert a C6 on a student’s record you should use the Departmental Monitoring screens on the SRS. You can access these by logging into the SRS, clicking on Maintenance Screens; Departmental Student Monitoring.

The Tier 4 Team are happy to assist with any case when it arises but it is always the School’s duty to ensure that the C6/C7 is entered properly, and at the appropriate stage, to initiate the monitoring process. This ensures that any possible appeal made by the student can be quickly dealt with and we can ensure that the correct policy has been followed in case of an appeal.

Sometimes a student may have compelling reasons for missing classes however it is crucial that when viewing a student’s attendance and engagement with a course, their ability to meet the learning outcomes of that course is the overriding factor in deciding to formally monitor a student and on the ability to reinstate them onto a course/programme.

Formal monitoring using the C6/C7 process, should not be viewed as a last resort by staff and it is designed to flag issues to the student early and will, when applied properly, give them the opportunity to get back on track with their studies.
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

How do we monitor UG students?

Given the nature of UG teaching, we try to monitor students in the same way regardless of their immigration status.

All students registered on a course need to be monitored by the School to which that course belongs. Formal attendance checking should take place in all instances of small group teaching (such as a tutorial, lab, seminar, workshop, practical session, oral lab, etc.) as per the standard monitoring policy applicable across the University. Details on the overarching monitoring policy are available on Staffnet.

Attendance checking should normally take the form of a sign in sheet, provided at each small group teaching session, which clearly outlines the following information:

- course code and title;
- name of class;
- date and time of class;
- staff member responsible for the class;
- a list of all students expected with ID numbers and space for them to sign in against their details; and
- a signature of the tutor or staff member responsible for the class confirming that those students who have signed in were present at the class.

Some Schools have found it useful to provide a class list from the SRS (or MyTimetable) which can also show photos of students to assist with identification – especially helpful in larger classes or at the start of teaching.

Sign in sheets should then be returned to the School’s central admin team as soon as possible after the class so that information can be reviewed and students identified as missing. These sheets should also be retained (either original or scanned copies) as they are required in the event of a Home Office audit. We would suggest scanning all attendance sheets for a particular course at the end of the year and saving this file in a central location so it can be quickly retrieved in the future.

Some Schools are making good use of the overview sheets provided by MyTimetable (formerly MyCourses) to assist with the monitoring of students. This can be a great tool to provide a quick overview of student attendance but should be backed up with physical sign-in sheets.

When do we apply a C6 to their record?

When a student has: missed two consecutive small group teaching sessions; or over 25% of the total sessions in that course (without prior approval) this should be reported using a C6 marker on the SRS. A C6 should also be applied immediately when a student fails to hand in a summative/substantial formative assessment or fails to attend an exam without authorisation.

The C6 marker should be seen as the first step in a process to ensure a student engages in their studies and not as a last resort. It is important that this is applied as soon as the threshold for reporting is reached so that we are able to maintain our reporting duties with the Home Office. This also ensures consistency across the Schools for all students.

What happens once the C6 is applied to their record?
Once the C6 is applied an automated email is sent to the student from Registry advising them on how to resolve the situation. In the vast majority of cases a student will resolve their C6 by contacting the School to explain their absences, with no further action being taken against their studies or visa should the situation not happen again. It is critical, therefore, that formal monitoring is applied quickly and not viewed as a last resort or punishment.

Where a C6 is not resolved, either due to the student not getting in touch or the School not removing it, it will turn into a C7, removing their class certificate and authority to attend classes.

**What about UG student absences?**

Short absences from study should be reported by the student using MyAberdeen. Where a student requests a long period of absence – greater than 1 week – this should be discussed with Tier 4 to see if it is permitted under the Home Office regulations. In most cases it would not possible for a UG student to miss more than 2 consecutive weeks of teaching.

UG Students are permitted to be absent from campus during non-term time. For UG students this includes the Christmas, Easter and summer breaks. Details of terms dates are available on the [University Website](#).

UG Students taking absences away from Aberdeen out with term-time do not need to complete any forms or requests with the School. They also do not need special permission from the University to leave the UK out with term-time.

**What if a UG student’s course has no small group teaching at a particular point during term?**

At some points of the year it is possible that a student will not have any small group teaching due to the nature of the course they are registered on. This could be because they are engaging in a formally recognised work placement, field course or writing their dissertation or completing a project.

Where this is the case the School must ensure that an alternative method of attendance monitoring is in place for this course. In most cases we would expect this to be a centrally maintained sign-in sheet. Students should be asked to sign-in physically, on campus, at least once every two weeks to ensure our obligations are met.

More details on how to arrange a sign in process are contained in the section on PGR students.

**Students on an outgoing Erasmus or Study Abroad programme**

Tier 4 students who take a gap from study in Aberdeen to partake in time away with an Erasmus or Study Abroad partner do not need to be monitored by the Schools.

Arrangement are in place for these students to be monitored by the Erasmus and Study Abroad teams, who provide information directly to the Tier 4 Team.

Students visiting the UK as in incoming Erasmus or Study Abroad student should be monitored as normal by the Schools where they appear on their class lists.
Students engaging in medical electives

Students engaging in a medical elective as part of their programme must continue to be monitored during this time. It will be up to the School to ensure monitoring is in place – usually by a sign-in at the temporary study location.

Details of electives should be notified to the Tier 4 team as soon as they are known and no less than 10 days before the date of departure, or commencement, of the elective away from campus.
POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT STUDENTS

How do we monitor PGT students?

Given the nature of the taught element of PGT programmes, we try to monitor students in the same way regardless of their immigration status. This is especially the case in the first and second semester where most PGT students will be engaging in classroom based teaching.

All students registered on a course need to be monitored by the School to which that course belongs. Formal attendance checking should take place in all instances of small group teaching (such as a tutorial, lab, seminar, workshop, practical session, oral lab, etc.) as per the standard monitoring policy applicable across the University. Details on the overarching monitoring policy are available on Staffnet.

Attendance checking should normally take the form of a sign in sheet, provided at each small group teaching session, which clearly outlines the following information:

- course code and title;
- name of class;
- date and time of class;
- staff member responsible for the class;
- a list of all students expected with ID numbers and space for them to sign in against their details; and
- a signature of the tutor or staff member responsible for the class confirming that those students who have signed in were present at the class.

Some Schools have found it useful to provide a class list from the SRS (or MyTimetable) which can also show photos of students to assist with identification – especially helpful in larger classes or at the start of teaching.

Sign in sheets should then be returned to the School’s central admin team as soon as possible after the class so that information can be reviewed and students identified as missing. These sheets should also be retained (either original or scanned copies) as they are required in the event of a Home Office audit. We would suggest scanning all attendance sheets for a particular course at the end of the year and saving this file in a central location so it can be quickly retrieved in the future.

Some Schools are making good use of the overview sheets provided by MyTimetable (formerly MyCourses) to assist with the monitoring of students. This can be a great tool to provide a quick overview of student attendance but should be backed up with physical sign-in sheets.

When do we apply a C6 to their record?

When a student has: missed two consecutive small group teaching sessions (without prior approval); or over 25% of the total sessions in that course, this should be reported using a C6 marker on the SRS. A C6 should also be applied immediately when a student fails to hand in a summative/substantial formative assessment or fails to attend an exam without authorisation.

The C6 marker should be seen as the first step in a process to ensure a student engages in their studies and not as a last resort. It is important that this is applied as soon as the threshold for reporting is reached so that we are able to maintain our reporting duties with the Home Office. This also ensures consistency across the Schools for all students.
What happens once the C6 is applied to their record?

Once the C6 is applied an automated email is sent to the student from Registry advising them on how to resolve the situation. In the vast majority of cases a student will resolve their C6 by contacting the School to explain their absences, with no further action being taken against their studies or visa should the situation not happen again. It is critical, therefore, that formal monitoring is applied quickly and, as stated above, not viewed as a last resort or punishment.

Where a C6 is not resolved, either due to the student not getting in touch or the School not removing it, it will turn into a C7, removing their class certificate and authority to attend the class.

How do we monitor students during their project or dissertation?

Students must continue to be monitored during the project/dissertation as their visa still requires them to be engaging, full-time, on campus. This extends right through the summer period as, for PG students, the summer break does not apply.

For those that have been monitored by class attendance previously, the most suitable method of monitoring during this time is through the use of a sign in sheet (much like PGR students).

Tier 4 students should be asked to report at least once a fortnight, although some Schools choose to do this weekly. More details on how to arrange a sign in process are contained in the section on PGR students.

It is important to remember that a Tier 4 visa requires its holder to be engaging on campus to complete their programme. Students should be actively discouraged from leaving Aberdeen during this time due to the consequences this will have for their visa and on our Sponsor Licence.

What if my student wants to return home over the summer to complete their project/dissertation?

If a student wishes to return home over the summer period the student must inform the School of this in advance. Where this period will go beyond that permitted for an authorised absence, the student’s visa will be reported to the Home Office as no longer needed to study, and the student will not need to meet any monitoring requirements. They will not be able to re-enter the UK on this visa and should not need to return during their studies.

It is important that Schools tell the Tier 4 Team when a student is going to miss signing in for this reason, so that the appropriate action can be taken on their visa. An email chain will be sufficient for this action to be taken, but the student must be aware of the consequences to their visa.

Students can be supported to return to the UK for their graduation on a visiting visa.

What if a student submits their project/dissertation early?

September starts: if a September-start Tier 4 student submits their project and does not intend to maintain signing in until their end date of study (as shown on the SRS which for most PGT students is in September) the Tier 4 Team should be notified, because we may be required to report their Tier 4 visa.

January starts: Tier 4 January start students are still required to have their attendance checked from the point that they submit their project to the point when term starts again in September. During the
period between the submission of their project/dissertation and the start of the taught courses, they should be required to report to the School at least fortnightly and should request authorised absence (in line with the information below) if they wish to spend time away from Aberdeen and will miss the monitoring checks.

**What about student absences?**

Used in the case of a student who is ill, has personal mitigating circumstances or wishes to take a short holiday during their programme. It should be used to cover a period of no more than 4 weeks throughout the student’s year of study. This should be viewed cumulatively during each academic year and must not exceed these amounts during their programme if multiple, smaller absences are authorised.

An Authorised Absence must not impact a student’s ability to complete their programme within the initial timescale expected.

PGT Students are permitted to be absent from campus during the Christmas and Easter breaks. They are not, however, entitled to automatic time off during the summer break. Details of terms dates are available on the University Website.

Schools will need to decide the maximum time permitted for authorised absence, which may depend on the time of year and programme. It may be decided that an absence is not permitted regardless of duration. The maximum, as outlined above, is 4 weeks throughout the course of the programme (and this period is in addition to the Christmas and Easter breaks, outlined above).

The student should inform the School of their absence and the School should acknowledge it with their approval. The School should keep a record of this correspondence and complete any forms required – this is required in case the University is audited by the Home Office.

PG Registry and the Tier 4 Team do not need to be told about any authorised absence that falls under the above parameters as long as these are documented, and evidenced, at the School in case of a formal Home Office audit.

Schools must ensure that students are not abusing the absence system to avoid signing in – especially over the summer period. Students cannot take four separate weeks of holiday that coincide with a signing-in week in order to maximise their time away from campus.

**Can a PGT student be regarded as being “off-campus” to study?**

In some rare instances it is possible for a PGT student to engage in activity that is academically required for their programme away from campus. There must be exceptionally strong academic reasons for this and how it links to their programme and its completion.

As such, occasions should be very rare and each instance should be discussed with the Tier 4 Team directly to ensure that it can be approved under their visa. During the time away the student must still be monitored by engagement with Academic Staff and “virtual sign-ins” with the School Office. Engagement should be monitored by email correspondence, phone calls or Skype meetings. These should be recorded as per the guidance for Academic Staff, later in this guidance.

**What if my student is on a work placement?**
A student can be absent from campus when they are on a work placement which forms a recognised and assessed part of their degree. This is a defined term by the Home Office and the placement must meet certain criteria for it to be classified as a “work placement” for Tier 4 Students.

Work placements in this context must be an integrated element of their programme which forms an assessed part of their degree and evidence of how this placement is assessed (and credits assigned) should be clear.

Schools will need to keep a record of the Tier 4 students who are on work placement and pass these details to the Tier 4 Team when they are known. We will then update the Home Office with details of their new study arrangements for that period.

For each Tier 4 student on work placement, Schools should confirm the duration of the placement, the start and end dates, the number of hours they are on placement per week, the address of the placement, and the percentage of the programme that the placement takes up, and details of how the student’s attendance will be monitored whilst they are on placement.

As with students on short term off-campus study, the School’s duty to monitor students on work placements does not stop. They must ensure that appropriate monitoring is in place, either with a contact at the placement location taking regular sign-ins and passing these to the School or engagement should be monitored by email correspondence, phone calls or Skype meetings. These should be recorded as per the guidance for Academic Staff, later in this guidance.

Student who wish to partake in any other form of work placement (one that is not regarded as such by the Home Office) should seek advice from an International Student Adviser as it may not be permitted under the terms of their Tier 4 visa.
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

How should we monitor a PGR student?

Due to the lack of class teaching at PGR level, we have to establish an alternative monitoring and engagement process to satisfy Home Office requirements.

This is done on two levels: engagement & academic progression; and physical presence on campus.

Monitoring academic progression and engagement

This should be done by the student’s supervisor(s) who should flag any concerns with their student’s studies to the School office or Tier 4 Team when it arises. This could be a missed meeting, a failure to submit work, or a significant concern over progression in their programme. More details on how to monitor and report such issues is outlined in the section for Academic Staff, later in this guidance.

Monitoring physical presence on campus

In most cases Schools have created a sign-in system that requires PGR Tier 4 students to attend a central location on a recurring basis to sign a register confirming their attendance on campus.

Such a sign-in system should:

- Ensure that a sign-in is obtained at least once every fortnight (or specifically 10 working days). No greater gap between sign in sessions is permitted, regardless of where the student is located and we would expect to see a signature at least every 10 working days;
- Be countersigned by a staff member, confirming that the student was seen and signed-in on the date indicated. Some Schools have a dedicated staff member responsible for their Tier 4 sign-ins who is able to build a relationship with their Tier 4 students. This may not always be possible but it is important that student signatures are verified by a staff member when they are completed;
- Be clearly dated so we know when the student signed in and, critically, when they have not. Sheets can either be produced weekly/fortnightly for all Tier 4 students or you can maintain an individual sign-in sheet for each Tier 4 student. Critically the system must ensure students do not sign in either after, or before, the required session; and
- Be reviewed weekly so that any issues can be raised quickly with the Supervisor and the Tier 4 Team.

The administration of a PGR sign-in system is left to each School to decide so that this fits in with their own resources. Some may decide to keep a weekly sign in system, and others fortnightly.

Critically the system must ensure that a student is required to sign-in with no more than 10 working days between each contact point.

When do I formally monitor a PGR student?

Schools should formally monitor a Tier 4 PGR student where:

- they miss two consecutive sign-ins; OR
- their total missed sign-ins represent more than 25% of the total sign-ins that student has been required to complete in the academic year to date: OR
• their supervisor indicates that they have missed a formal meeting, or have failed to submit a piece of work as expected.

**How do I formally monitor a PGR student?**

This should be done by placing a C6 against the course code on their student record. If you are unable to do this, or a course is not present, please alert the Tier 4 Team for advice.

**In what circumstances should a student not be formally monitoring when they are absent?**

**Authorised absence**

Used in the case of a student who is ill, on authorised holiday leave or has personal mitigating circumstances. The maximum period permitted in any academic year should be limited to 8 weeks, provided the School are assured that the absence will not impact on the student’s ability to complete their PhD on time. If it is felt that the proposed absence will impact their completion and may result in a required extension, then a suspension form should be completed which will be reviewed by the Tier 4 team to see if it is possible under their visa.

This maximum period of absence is usually set by the College and you should confirm this with them.

The student should inform the School of their absence in advance and the School should acknowledge it with their approval. The School should keep a record of this correspondence. Some Schools may choose to have an absence form for such requests and these should be retained by the School.

If a student has been granted an authorised absence and then requests a further period of absence on top of that within the same academic year, exceeding the College maximum, the absence must **not** be approved.

PG Registry and the Tier 4 Team do not need to be told about any authorised absence that falls under the above parameters as long as these are documented, and evidenced, at the School in case of a formal Home Office audit.

**Suspension of studies**

Used when a student wishes to “pause” their studies. It effectively stops the clock and extends their submission date in line with the period suspended.

Students holding a Tier 4 visa can suspend for a maximum of 2 months during the course of their visa. This does not mean they can suspend for 2 months each academic year, but 2 months during the entirety of their PHD. Suspensions longer than 2 months will require us to stop sponsorship of their visa. These situations must be discussed with the Tier 4 Team in advance. Similarly if a student wishes to extend a suspension beyond 2 months this must be discussed with the Tier 4 Team.

Retrospective suspensions cannot be used for Tier 4 Students and where these are submitted they will be rejected.
Off-campus study

Where a student will be spending time away from campus to engage in data collection or research they may be able to apply for off-campus study.

Where a student will be away from campus for sound academic reasons they should complete an off-campus study form so that formal approval is given by the College and their visa is considered by the Tier 4 Team. The critical factor we must assess is the academic requirement of the time off-campus. It is important to note that off-campus approval may be granted academically but this does not mean it will not have an impact on the student’s Tier 4 visa.

Simply wishing to return home to write up their thesis or wishing to live away from Aberdeen due to cost or other reasons of convenience cannot be considered a legitimate reason for a student going off-campus with relation to their visa. This does not mean they cannot decide to go off-campus but that action may be taken to report their visa as no longer sponsored.

Students should not complete off-campus forms retrospectively and the Tier 4 Team must be informed of the student’s departure at least 10 days in advance of it commencing – this means the form must make it to the College office and then to Registry within this timeframe.

A student who holds a Tier 4 visa must not be off-campus for more than 50% of their programme. We have a duty to ensure only students who need their visa to remain the UK are sponsored under Tier 4, and those who are away for significant periods of time do not meet this criteria.

Students who are off-campus must still be monitored while they are away and none of the Schools obligations are removed when off-campus arrangements are put in place. This monitoring can take a number of forms and can include: Skype meetings, telephone calls, emails and in person visits by supervisors. The form of intended monitoring must be noted on the off campus form and recorded on the student’s monitoring file. As with standard monitoring failure to keep in contact on at least a fortnightly basis must be reported as a breach of student engagement requirements.

For new students, it is important that Admissions and Registry are informed if off-campus study is known in advance of registration. Intended off-campus study may impact the type of visa the student should apply for and, in some cases, could save significant time and money in inappropriate visa applications being made.

Off-campus requests for Tier 4 students will be passed to the Tier 4 Team to assess what, if any, action is needed on the student visa. All off-campus requests that are approved are reported to the Home Office, indicating a temporary change in study location. They will only be approved for such reporting where there are sound academic grounds.

Personal choice and convenience cannot be regarded and a student is required by their visa to be in Aberdeen, full-time unless their programme demands otherwise. In situations where this is seen to be the driving factor for the period of off-campus study it is likely that we will have to report their visa as no longer required at the periods commencement.

How do we monitor a student during their off-campus period?

The School is responsible to ensure that students studying off-campus meet the same monitoring requirements as campus based students. While this will not be physical sign-in, it must be fortnightly contact with the School – either a central administrator or via their supervisor. Email contact can be
used, in conjunction with telephone calls, skype meetings etc. It is important that full details of these arrangements are outlined in the off-campus request which must include contact points no more than a fortnight apart.

Schools may decide to place responsibility for monitoring student engagement and progression during these times to their supervisors. Advice to academics on how to keep a record of such engagement is included later in this guidance.

Critically the School must be able to provide confirmation that off-campus authorisation was received by the student from Registry (not just that a form was completed by the School) and that evidence of monitoring is available at fortnightly intervals during their time away.

You can confirm with the Tier 4 team when a student’s off-campus request has been approved, which is also noted on the SRS under: Portals; Registration; Student Status Lookup; General Visa Information Tab.

**What happens during writing up and viva?**

We are still required to monitor Tier 4 students during their writing up period and viva – right until the completion of their studies.

Completion takes place once corrections are approved and Registry has completed the student on the SRS. You can confirm that this has taken place by the student being removed from the monthly PGR report sent by the Tier 4 Team to the colleges, or by contacting postgraduate@abdn.ac.uk
**Guidance for Academic Staff**

Every staff member at the University has a duty to ensure the institution is complying with its legal obligations under Immigration Law. We do try and minimise the impact such duties have on staff and their students, however the importance of our Tier 4 responsibilities are such that additional measures need to be put in place to ensure we are complying with Immigration Law.

Course/Programme Co-ordinators have a responsibility to ensure that all the students registered to study on one of their courses or programmes are meeting the learning objectives of their course/programme. Where you become concerned about a student’s ability to meet the learning objectives of your course you should report this to your School office or course administrator. They will then take the appropriate action on the student’s record to ensure this is flagged with them to resolve.

Staff teaching on a Course/Programme should also be aware of the requirements to take sign in sheets at small group teaching (such as tutorials, seminars and labs) and return these promptly to the administration team.

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**Formal monitoring using the C6/C7 process, should not be viewed as a last resort by staff and it is designed to flag issues to the student early and will, when applied properly, give them the opportunity to get back on track with their studies.**

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**PGR Supervisors**

It is expected that supervisors and students will remain in contact on a regular basis to ensure that progression is being made against the student’s research and towards their final award. In most cases we would expect this to be by face-to-face meetings on campus on a regular basis. This can also be supplemented with frequent emails, Skype/telephone conversations and even site visits. These interactions must be recorded and should take place at least every 4 weeks, but more frequently is better.

Supervisors should be able to provide evidence of their student’s progression and the contacts they have had, should this be asked for by the Home Office. They may also be asked to attend an interview with the Home Office during a formal audit to confirm that progression has taken place and how this is recorded and evidenced.

One suggestion is for each supervisor to keep a “progression log” for their students which outlines, in limited detail, the interactions that they have with their students. This could take the form of a simple excel spreadsheet/word document completed with each milestone of progression and the meetings/correspondence held with the student:
Another alternative is to make use of the Diary Notes function of the SRS which can be used by any staff member to note an interaction with a student. The Diary Notes function can be accessed by logging into the SRS and navigating to: *Maintenance Screens; Departmental: Record Diary Notes*.

For more information on meeting our Home Office obligations and your role, please contact your SAO/College office or the Tier 4 Team.
Useful Links

UKVI Guidance for Tier 4 students applying for a visa is available at the Home Office website. This guidance updates regularly and should be read in conjunction with the Immigration Rules and University policy and procedure – https://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa

Information on the Academic Technology Approval Scheme which is required by some of our students studying on certain programmes is available from the Home Office – https://www.gov.uk/academic-technology-approval-scheme

Information for new students, including registration and completing an arrival visa check, are available on our Infohub website – http://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/study/visa-and-immigration.php

Information on visas and Immigration for our prospective students are available on our Student Recruitment webpages – http://www.abdn.ac.uk/study/international/visa-information-and-faqs-1471.php

Support services for students are outlined on the Infohub pages - http://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/support/index.php

Details of the University term dates can be found on the Infohub website - http://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/study/term-dates-201415-631.php

Information provided to Tier 4 students on their responsibilities can be found on the Infohub website - http://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/study/tier-4-students-1321.php
# Key Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
<th>Type of enquiry</th>
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| Tier 4 Team                             | tier4@abdn.ac.uk Extension: 3505       | • Monitoring and Engagement  
• Student absences  
• Student registration  
• Suspensions and withdrawals  
• Change in mode of study  
• Change of Degree  
• Staff training and information sessions |
| International Student Advisers          | Student.international@abdn.ac.uk Extension: 3935 | • Visa applications  
• Visa extensions  
• Doctoral Extension Scheme visas  
• Police Registration  
• Visa terms and conditions |
| Student Recruitment and Admissions      | sras@abdn.ac.uk Extension: 2090        | • Recruitment of new students  
• English language assessment  
• Issuing a CAS for new students  
• Information for prospective students |