

Sponsor and Student Visa Policy

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Introduction

Purpose

1. This Policy sets out Northeastern University London's (the University's) aims for the recruitment and admission of international students. It describes the principles and processes which are used to select and admit international students to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, while adhering to UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) rules and regulations.
2. This Policy is intended to give guidance to offer holders and staff on the University's policies for admitting international students to its programmes, linking to processes that ensure that we are complying with the Immigration Rules and UK Visas and Immigration guidance.
3. This Policy is consistent with good admissions practice for international students in higher education, as defined by the UKVI Student Sponsorship policy guidance documents:
 - 3.1. [Student Sponsor Guidance](#)
 - 3.1.1. [Document 1: Applying for a Student Sponsor Licence](#)
 - 3.1.2. [Document 2: Sponsorship Duties](#)
 - 3.1.3. [Document 3: Student sponsor compliance](#)
 - 3.1.4. [Document 4: Higher education regulatory reform](#)
 - 3.2. [Creating a CAS](#)
 - 3.3. [Immigration Rules](#)
 - 3.4. [Student Route caseworker guidance - Policy Guidance](#)

Definitions

4. The University uses 'offer holder' in this policy and therefore external references to 'prospective students' should be replaced by the word 'offer holder' by the reader.
5. The University uses 'programme' to describe its portfolio and therefore external references to 'course or courses' should be replaced by the word 'programme' by the reader.

University (Sponsor) Duties

General Duties

6. The University must comply with a number of duties in order to be granted and retain its student sponsor licence.
7. The University must apply for a Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) through the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) every 12 months. The core requirements that the University must meet are:
 - 7.1. a visa refusal rate of less than 10 percent;
 - 7.2. an enrolment rate of at least 90 percent; and
 - 7.3. a programme completion rate of at least 85 percent.
8. General duties include, but are not limited to, complying with all aspects of the immigration rules and sponsor guidance, cooperate with the Home Office, take responsibility for all its student route visa students while the University is sponsoring them, and record-keeping, attendance monitoring and reporting in relation to any sponsored students and the University.

Record Keeping Duties

9. As a student sponsor, the University is required to keep copies of specific documents as per [Appendix D](#), to demonstrate that its student route visa students have permission to be in the UK to undertake studies with the University. The University ensures that documents are kept throughout the sponsored time period and are available for any future UKVI audit. Further information is available in the [Documents to be Retained](#).

Sponsor Management System (SMS) Staff Responsibilities

10. Authorising Officer: The authorising officer is the most senior person responsible for the recruitment of students and ensuring that the University's duties are met. At the University the authorising officer is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).
11. Key Contact: The key contact is the staff member who is the main point of contact between the University and the UKVI. At the University, the key contact is the Director of Visa & Immigration Compliance (DoVIC).
12. Level 1 User: The Level 1 user is the staff member who undertakes the sponsor management system activities. At the University, the Level 1 user includes the Key Contact, Visa & Immigration Compliance Manager and select Visa Compliance Officers.

Confirmation Of Acceptance For Studies (CAS)

General CAS Information

13. The CAS costs the University a fee which is non-refundable.

14. The CAS is the University's confirmation to the UKVI that it has assessed the offer holder's intention and ability to study a programme that meets the Student Route visa requirements; that the offer holder has an unconditional offer to study that programme and that the offer holder will comply with all relevant requirements and conditions of their visa.
15. According to the Home Office Student & Child Student - Policy Guidance:
 - 15.1. The Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) is not an actual certificate or paper document but is a digital record. Each CAS has a unique reference number and contains information about the course of study for which it has been issued and the student's personal details.
 - 15.2. A Student Route visa applicant must score 70 points according to the Points Based System.
 - 15.3. The CAS is worth 50 points, maintenance funds are worth 10 points and 10 points for meeting English language requirements. It must contain the information specified in the
 - 15.4. [Immigration Rules](#), the [Student Route Caseworker Guidance](#) and the [Student Sponsor Guidance](#).
 - 15.5. Student Route visa applicants may also be required to clear credibility interviews in addition to gaining 70 points.

Issuing a CAS Statement and Pre-CAS Checks

16. In order to issue a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS), the University is required to do pre-CAS checks. As a result, offer holders must provide the following information:
 - 16.1. A copy of academic certificates
 - 16.2. A copy of passport
 - 16.3. Copies of previous visas to the UK
 - 16.4. Acceptable English language proficiency test or qualification, if applicable
 - 16.5. Evidence of finances that meet the requirements for a Student Route visa
 - 16.6. Valid tuberculosis test, if applicable
 - 16.7. Other documents required by UKVI
 - 16.8. Immigration History
 - 16.9. Declaration of Criminal Convictions

17. In addition, offer holders are required to pass the University's internal visa eligibility assessment (pre-CAS checks) and pay a CAS deposit which will be set off against the first semester fees in the first year of study.
18. Once offer holders have successfully passed the University's pre-CAS checks, the University will provide an electronic letter in .pdf format containing their 'CAS statement' comprising of the information which the University, as the offer holder's sponsor, has used for the CAS. The offer holder can then use this as a part of their visa application and to ensure that the information within their application matches the information that the University has provided to the UKVI.

Programme Start and End Dates

19. The programme start date is the date of enrolment in person, or induction on the programme, whichever is earlier.
20. The programme end date is the date by which the student is expected to have completed all academic elements of the programme.
21. The latest start date is the latest possible date for enrolment, which is 14 calendar days from the start of the first term/semester of each year of their programme. In exceptional circumstances an extension of an additional 14 calendar days or more may be agreed by the Registrar in consultation with the student's Programme Director. This is an allowance given to international offer holders in case they have any problems travelling or obtaining their visa in time. The Border Force Officers (UK Visa & Immigration Officers) at all the UK airports, ports and international rail stations will refuse the offer holder entry into the UK if they arrive after the latest start date of the programme (as detailed on the CAS statement). Entrants and returning students failing to fully complete registration or re-registration by the deadline are automatically administratively withdrawn from the University by the Registry All withdrawn international students are reported to UKVI and their visa sponsorship is also withdrawn within 10 working days from the date of withdrawal by Registry.

Amending a CAS After It Has Been Assigned

22. Offer holders should be provided with a draft CAS statement in order to ensure accuracy. After a confirmation email has been received from the offer holder, a CAS will be assigned. Exceptionally, the University will make amendments to the CAS after it has been assigned.
23. Acceptable amendments for the University to make to the CAS after it has been assigned are corrections to a mistyped forename, date of birth or updating any additional payments to fees.
24. The University will use the 'sponsor note' field on the Sponsorship Management System (SMS) to amend minor errors which have been

identified after a CAS has been assigned. However, the University strongly advises offer holders to verify all information from the beginning before a CAS is issued as a UKVI caseworker may misread or overlook the 'sponsor note'.

When to Withdraw or Assign a New CAS

25. The University will be willing to withdraw or assign a new CAS under the following circumstances:
 - 25.1. The offer holder wishes to change to a different programme, meets entry requirements of the new programme and has not applied for their Student Route visa.
 - 25.2. The University has given incorrect details on one or more of the following:
 - 25.2.1. The offer holder's nationality.
 - 25.2.2. The offer holder's date of birth.
 - 25.2.3. The offer holder's surname.
26. Offer holders who are refused a visa may not be issued with a second CAS (BCA).

Assessing a Student's Ability and Intention to Study

Responsibility

27. The University must be able to demonstrate to the UKVI that it is as confident as is reasonably possible that all its students are able and intend to undertake and complete the programme of study for which they have an unconditional offer and check that the applicant is a genuine student.

Intention to Study - Academic Ability

28. Before the University sponsors an offer holder and assigns a CAS, it is required by the UKVI to assess the offer holder's ability to follow the chosen programme of study. The University must state on the CAS what evidence has been used to make this assessment, for example an interview or academic certificates.

Intentions to Study and Checking English Language Ability

29. As part of the Student Route visa application, offer holders may be asked to have an interview either in person or over the telephone in order to identify whether offer holders are genuine students and meet the English

level requirements. In some cases, an offer holder may be asked to attend a second interview if required.

30. If as a result of the credibility interview the UKVI believes a student is not a genuine student and/or is unable to demonstrate the required level of English, the application will be refused.
31. The factors that are taken into consideration when assessing credibility can be found in the [Student Route of the Points Based System - Policy Guidance](#) based [Immigration Rules](#).

Intention to Study - Funds

32. The CAS must state the programme fees for the first year of the programme (if the programme is longer than one year). If the offer holder has already paid some or all the fees, this will be stated on the CAS.
33. If the University is offering a scholarship to the offer holder, then this must be stated on the CAS.
34. The University checks the financial documents of the student or student's parent or legal guardian to ensure the applicant will be able to meet UKVI maintenance funds requirements and to gain financial requirement points.

Acceptable Sources of Funds

35. The only acceptable ways of holding and providing evidence of funds for purposes of Student Route students are as stated in the [Student Route of the Points Based System - Policy Guidance](#).
36. Funds can be provided from any lawful source, including savings, income, loans, employers inside or outside the UK, parents, education providers, governments, or international scholarship agencies.

Unacceptable Sources of Funds

37. The [Student Route of the Points Based System - Policy Guidance](#) makes it clear that overdraft facilities, shares, bonds, overdrafts, pension funds and credit cards are not acceptable.
38. Although the funds can have a wide variety of sources, the ways in which those funds must be held and the ways in which they must be evidenced are very limited as stated in the [Student Route of the Points Based System - Policy Guidance](#).

Other Student Route Requirements

Academic Progression

39. This rule is in place to ensure that any applicant wishing to study a further course in the UK is not merely seeking to extend their stay in the UK but is progressing academically.
- 39.1. The visa applicant must have successfully completed (meaning the student has achieved the qualification for which they were studying) the programme for which they were last granted Tier 4 or Student Route visa leave or if they have changed programmes with the same sponsor, the programme they changed to.
 - 39.2. The academic progression rule is in place to ensure that visa applicants are progressing academically if they wish to study a further programme in the UK and are not merely seeking to extend their stay in the UK. Based on the above, if an offer holder has previously had permission to stay as a Student or a [Student Route Student](#), then the University can only give them a CAS for a new programme, if their new programme represents academic progress from their previous studies.
 - 39.3. [Student Route of the Points Based System - Policy Guidance](#) states in which circumstances a programme represents academic progress from previous study.

Assessment of English Language

40. The University must state in the 'evidence used to obtain offer section' of the CAS that the offer holder has attained the minimum level of SELT (Secure English Language Test), and how the assessment has been made. If the assessment is via the use of SELT, the score of the four standard components (writing, reading, speaking and listening) must also be stated on the CAS. The test must still be valid (Generally a SELT expires after 2 years, from the date taken), on the date in which the CAS is assigned, even if it expires before the student applies for leave or starts the programme. The University also accepts a variety of English language tests and qualifications. Please refer [here](#) for further information on other English tests and acceptable qualifications.

Exceptions to the English Language Requirement

41. Exceptions to the English Language requirement can be found in the UKVI Guidance - Assessing the English Language Requirement . If applicable, the University must then state that it is using one of these exceptions in the 'evidence used to obtain offer section' of the CAS.

Time Limit – Caps on Periods of Student Leave at Degree Level

42. The cap the UKVI has put on studying at undergraduate degree level (which is relevant for the University as the University does not offer any programmes that are lower than RQF level 6), as a Student Route visa from the age of 18, is five years. There are some exceptions, but they are not relevant to the University as the University does not offer the programme that fall under the exceptions, for example; Dentistry, Medicine, Architecture etc.
43. The University will calculate the period of time that an offer holder has spent studying in the UK using the information provided and copies of previous visas given to the University by the student. This also includes periods of leave (immigration permission) before and after study. The UKVI will base their calculation on the 'valid from' date and the 'valid until' date of each period of leave or Student visa. Tuberculosis Tests for Visa Application
44. Offer holders will need to have a tuberculosis (TB) test if they are coming to the UK for more than 6 months and are residents of a [country listed by the UKVI](#).
45. As a result, offer holders must provide a valid TB certificate as part of the pre-CAS checks.

Translations of Documents

46. Where any required documents are not in English, the offer holder must provide the original document and a full translation that can be independently verified by the UKVI.
47. The translation must be dated and must include:
 - 47.1. Confirmation that it is an accurate translation of the original document.
 - 47.2. The full name and original signature of the translator or an authorised official of the translation company.
 - 47.3. The translator or translation company's contact details. If these details are not provided on the translated document, these will need to be provided separately.

Documents to be Retained

48. As part of its Student Route responsibilities, the University must store certified copies of the documents as stated in [Appendix D](#) of the immigration rules and the documents used to assess offer holders' suitability to the programme. In addition, the University must keep copies of the documents requested as part of the pre-CAS checks:
 - 48.1. Application form to the University

- 48.2. Academic qualifications
 - 48.3. Academic or professional references
 - 48.4. Interview assessment form (optional)
 - 48.5. English language qualification or Test results
 - 48.6. Parents' consent letter to use funds (if applicable)
 - 48.7. Birth certificate (if applicable)
 - 48.8. Official translations (if applicable)
 - 48.9. Immigration History
 - 48.10. Declaration of Criminal Convictions
 - 48.11. CAS statement
 - 48.12. Passport
 - 48.13. Visa (vignette)
 - 48.14. Tickets or boarding pass (for students who enter the UK through an automated e-Passport gate) or the date of arrival in the UK
 - 48.15. Biometric Residence Permit
 - 48.16. A history of the student's contact details to include the UK residential
 - 48.17. Address, telephone number and mobile telephone number
 - 48.18. Records of student attendance and absences. See the Academic Engagement Policy for additional information.
49. All the above documents will be stored safely and securely in compliance with the University's [Data Protection Policy](#) and General Data Protection Regulations.

Offer Holders Under Other Immigration Categories

50. [Document 2 of the Student Route of the Points Based System: Student Route Policy Guidance for Sponsors](#) states that:
- “A sponsor has a duty to comply with all aspects of the Immigration Rules and sponsor guidance, and support immigration control, including by taking steps to ensure that every student at their institution has permission to study in the UK throughout the whole period of their study...”.
- Failure to do so may lead to the revocation of the University's student sponsor licence.

51. As a result, the University must ensure that all offer holders with other types of visas have the right to study in the UK and they hold a valid visa for the whole duration of their programme.
52. Those applicants who are not on student visa but on a different type of immigration permission in the UK or a visa must provide an official immigration document during the admissions process in order to receive an offer to study at the University.
53. The Visa Compliance team will check the type of the visa and inform admissions about the outcome of this check. If the outcome is negative, the applicant will be informed and will not be allowed to study with the University and their offer will become null and void. The Visa Compliance team will run a final right to study check with UKVI on the day of in-person enrolment to verify the student's right to study in the UK.
54. If the immigration document does not cover the total duration of the programme, offer holders must sign a declaration stating that they will apply for a valid leave before their current permission expires.
55. Offer holders must provide to the University evidence of their visa application and once they obtain the new one, they must provide it to the University.

Monitoring and Reporting

56. The responsibility of this Policy lies with the University's DoVIC.
57. The DoVIC will report at least annually to the Executive Dean.

Version History

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24.7.0	December 2023	January 2024	Director of Visa and Immigration Compliance	April 2026
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Referenced documents	Undergraduate Student Attendance Policy; Academic Engagement Policy; Immigration History Form; Declaration of Criminal Convictions Risk Assessment Policy and Procedure for Students and Offer Holders.			
External Reference Point(s)	UK Quality Code: Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access; Guidance on applications for UK Student Route visas; UK visas and registering with the police; Tuberculosis tests for visa offer holders; Immigration Rules; Applying for a Student Route licence; Sponsorship duties; Creating CAS; User manuals: Sponsorship Management System (SMS)			