

Student Engagement and Attendance Monitoring Process 2020/21

Background:

The University started delivering all of its teaching online from 30 March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, the usual mechanisms for monitoring taught students' attendance were not all possible and therefore an interim system of running attendance reports using Canvas data was quickly put into place. This interim system enables staff to see how many times a student has logged on over any given period, although it gives no specifics (such as what types of learning materials the student may have accessed), it does demonstrate engagement/access to their tailored course materials. The timing of the spring vacation and summer assessment periods meant that this interim system was relied upon for a limited period as timetabled teaching concluded at this point.

The University has committed to all students that a blended approach to teaching and learning is to be introduced, comprising a mix of online learning and face-to-face teaching. Therefore, our monitoring approach will need to reflect changes to teaching as well as any changes to the University's compliance obligations.

The monitoring process must address the following priority areas: UKVI Tier IV compliance; supporting Public Health England's Track and Trace system; identifying students who may require welfare and/or academic support.

Process:

Canvas Engagement: the current Canvas reporting functionality enables staff to monitor how often a student has logged on during any given period, although it does not show the nature of the engagement. It has the advantage that it can be used to monitor remote engagement, whether the student is in the UK or their home country (UKVI are continuing to allow distance learning during the next academic year). It can therefore be useful as the initial tool to trigger further enquiries or action. However, as it would theoretically be possible for someone to log on each week and not actually engage with any meaningful study, we could not rely solely on this.

Attendance: Attendance at elements of direct engagement/'meaningful contacts' (e.g. seminars, lectures, Academic Adviser meetings, Student Life Centre engagements, etc.), both face-to-face and synchronous on-line, will, then, still be recorded as usual and allow reports to be run in the usual way via Cognos/Sussex Direct. This will:

- First and foremost, ensure that we can respond to student support needs that may arise.
- Support Canvas engagement data for Tier IV compliance and student monitoring for welfare/academic support purposes (including SSPC processes, which should be supportive to the range of situations that students may be in this academic year).

- Help support information for Public Health England's Track and Trace system.
- Guidance for taking attendance registers is addressed below.

The existing policy of escalating School communications and meetings (included below, Appendix A) would still apply; one of the aims here is to keep as close as possible to normal practices.

Identifying students of concern:

Report 1: Engagement

- School Offices run weekly or fortnightly (determined by School) Canvas reports to identify students with low engagement.
- School Offices can run these reports using Cognos (*Topic Based Resources > Student > Student Administration > Student Engagement Monitoring > Canvas Engagement*). This Cognos report allows time ranges to be set and is likely the preferred option.
 - o Alternatively, reports can be run from Canvas and guidance on doing this is provided as a separate attachment ('Using the Administrative Reports in Canvas'). Several possible reports are included in the guidance, but the recommended one would be is Last User Access (this is the data that the Cognos report uses).
- Students identified as having had no engagement with Canvas during a 2-week period should then be checked against Attendance Reports (Report 2 below).
- Tier IV students and all other students are monitored in the same way in this process, the points below indicate the change in regulatory requirements for Tier IV students.
- **All students (including Tier IV students):** if there is no Canvas engagement and attendance is below normal School expectations this will trigger Stage 1 of existing attendance policy.
- **Tier IV students:** if there is no Canvas engagement or attendance during a 2-week period as well as triggering Stage 1 of existing attendance policy (as above) a 60 day window (30 days for distance learners) will begin at the end of which, if there is no evidence of re-engagement, would lead to withdrawal of sponsorship (unless exceptional circumstances apply).

Example process in context of Tier IV students:

- 2 weeks of no engagement starts Stage 1 of standard escalation process (contact student to express concern etc.).
- 2 further weeks of no engagement starts Stage 2 (or Stage 3 for distance learners, including invitation to SSPC).
- 2 further weeks of no engagement starts Stage 3 for non-distance learners.
- SSPC must take place within 30/60 days of starting Stage 1.

Report 2: Attendance

- Whilst Canvas reports are the first and primary means of monitoring Engagement and Attendance, we should also run regular Cognos reports to check for attendance at 'meaningful contacts' (for example, face-to-face and synchronous on-line teaching sessions, Academic Advising meetings, SLC contact, etc.). Frequency is determined by School but may be less frequent than typical due to Engagement Reports.
- Where attendance is below normal School standards ('Identifying Poor Attendance and Engagement'; [Attendance, Engagement and Absence Policy](#)) and gives cause for concern Schools are advised to make further enquiries of the student as a supportive measure and, if concerns remain, go to Stage 1 of existing attendance policy.
- This aims to identify students who may have welfare/academic support needs, where Canvas access reports do not provide sufficient detail.

Recording Attendance Registers:

- Attendance should be recorded at 'meaningful contacts', following normal School definitions, whether these are conducted face-to-face or synchronously on-line.
- In addition, any contact with a 'face-to-face' element (e.g. blended/rotational lectures, seminars, etc.) must record attendance, which will help to support the PHE Track and Trace system.
- However, for Health and Safety in relation to COVID-19, **attendance recording cannot use physical registers that are circulated between or handled by multiple participants.**

Alternative means of recording attendance are advised, examples of which include (as determined by School or tutor):

- a) using the University Sussex App to publish/provide a PIN code during the class that students would then enter in their own Sussex App; this would automatically enter attendance data into Sussex Direct (guidance on using Sussex App to follow);
- b) tutor holds a single register (e.g. with gallery view) either physical or using Sussex Direct on-screen and tutor completes this during the class duration (ideally for smaller group teaching).
- c) For synchronous on-line sessions, using a Zoom participant list or the Sussex App with PIN (a) would be exemplar options.

Appendix A:

Existing [Policy on Contact, Reporting and Withdrawal](#)

Stage 1

School administrative staff will contact the student to notify them that there is a concern and remind them of attendance and engagement requirements. If the student has missed a high number of monitored contact points (but less than 10) they will be referred to their academic advisor or supervisor to discuss their attendance and engagement, or to the Student Life Centre to discuss any non-academic issues.

Stage 2

Where a student does not improve their attendance and engagement following Stage 1, they will be contacted by the DOSE expressing the School's increased concern. Where a Tier IV student's attendance or engagement is very low the DOSE will usually invite the student to a School progress meeting where they can:

- agree targets for the student and regular further meetings to review progress;
- review the University's PREVENT policy where necessary;
- discuss other routes of referral for non-academic support.

Stage 3

If no action is taken or improvement seen on the part of the student after Stage 1 and/or Stage 2, students should be sent/mailed a letter signed by the DOSE advising that their continued registration has been referred to the School Student Progress Committee (SSPC). Students may be signposted to services such as the Student Life Centre or Student Support Unit for non-academic matters.

Appendix B:

Summary of New/Future UKVI requirements:

Below degree level – at least 15 hours classroom-based attendance per week. Needs investigating and recording if less than 85% attendance in any given month. Withdraw sponsorship if attendance less than 70% for 3 consecutive months and no exceptional or evidenced reasons.

Degree level and above. Sponsors must:

- Have a single academic engagement policy that applies consistently to international students across their institution. It may also include home students and can differentiate between study at different levels.
- Note individual records with reasons for lack of engagement and any steps taken to get the student to re-engage
- Withdraw sponsorship (unless exceptional circumstances apply) where the student fails to re-engage with their studies within 60 days (30 days for distance learning) of the first contact from their sponsor regarding their lack of academic engagement*

Sponsors must also be able to demonstrate:

- how the policy is being applied
- that systems are in place to monitor academic engagement
- what information is being recorded to confirm that students are academically engaging
- what actions are expected when a lack of academic engagement is identified
- that they have a robust system in place to identify any student who has a period of non-engagement which exceeds 60 days in duration and the action they will take to support the student to re-engage
- that they have a clear policy on when non-engagement will lead to withdrawal of sponsorship.
- a policy for work placements/research programmes/field trips; postgraduate doctor or dentist courses; study abroad programmes; dissertation periods with no taught elements; Student Union Sabbatical Officers.
- a procedure for notifying UKVI and withdrawing sponsorship if a student has deferred studies for more than 60 days unless exceptional circumstances apply.