

# Engagement Policy for Online Distance Learning (ODL) Students

## 1. Preamble

- 1.1. The Engagement Policy for Online Distance Learning (ODL) Courses applies to courses offered entirely online by the University with the exception of single module offerings such as continuous professional development courses.
- 1.2. Poor engagement and unaccounted absence can put students at risk academically. The University's Student Success team, working in collaboration with Schools, will monitor engagement in order to ensure students are successfully progressing, to be supportive and anticipatory in its approach to carrying out its duty of care for all students.
- 1.3. The University aims to ensure students receive information, advice and guidance at the earliest opportunity to support their efforts in overcoming barriers to study, and reduce the chance of issues escalating.

## 2. Underpinning Principles

- 2.1. This policy is underpinned by the following principles:
  - Students need to engage in order to progress in their chosen course, and a range of services are available to support students in this
  - Good engagement is essential to a good student experience
  - Students are active participants in ensuring their own success

## 3. Progression requirements

- 3.1. Students are expected to engage as is necessary to progress in their studies and complete their course within their maximum period of registration (typically 4 years for an online Masters course). All staff involved in the delivery or support of the University's online courses are expected to familiarise themselves with this policy, and are expected to provide students with information to support their engagement.

## 4. Breaks in Study

- 4.1. ODL courses are designed to be flexible, accommodating temporary breaks in study within the maximum period of registration as outlined in a student's Offer Letter.
- 4.2. Any student studying on an applicable online course wishing to take a break in study must discuss this with their Student Success Adviser (SSA) in the first instance. The SSA will discuss the implications of any proposed break on the student's maximum period of registration and their earliest possible course completion date. As part of the discussion a return to study date will be agreed.

- 4.3. Students must confirm their intention to return to study in advance of the agreed return to study date. Confirmation can be provided in the following ways:
- Contacting their Student Success Adviser by email or telephone.
  - Making their next module payment.
  - Re-registering through Sussex Direct.

A reminder will be sent by the SSA prior to the agreed or anticipated date of return.

- 4.4. Where students fail to return by their agreed return date, or take an undisclosed/unapproved break in study, an eight-week (or one module) grace period will be offered from agreed return to student date before triggering the stages of escalation as detailed in Section 6. The SSA will contact the student during this period to advise them of the consequences of their failure to return.

## **5. Failure to Return to Study**

- 5.1. If a student does not resume study on an agreed return to study date, and they do not contact their Student Success Adviser over a period of eight weeks, the Student Success Team will issue a non-attendance report to the Course Director and Course Coordinator for the relevant School.
- 5.2. Schools will follow the process outlined in section 6 below where a non-attendance report is received.

## **6. Contact, Reporting and Withdrawal**

- 6.1. In broad alignment with existing processes relating to attendance and engagement for on-campus course provision, a three stage process should be followed.
- 6.2. Stage 1 - School administrative staff will write to the relevant student (copying in the Student Success team) to notify them that there is a concern about their non-engagement absence. The student will be informed to contact their Student Success Adviser before the start of the next teaching period to confirm why they have taken a break in study and to agree a return date. If no response is received from the student by the start of the next teaching period Student Success will notify the School requesting the student's case be escalated to Stage 2.
- 6.3. Stage 2 - Where a student does not return to study or contact their Student Success Adviser to agree a return date following Stage 1, the student will move to Stage 2 and will be referred to the relevant School Director of Student Experience (DoSE) who will contact the student and invite them to a virtual progress meeting where they can:
- Discuss the reasons for the student's non-attendance and identify ways in which the University may offer support to help the student get back on track.
  - Discuss other routes of referral for non-academic support.
  - Discuss and agree a return date to study.
- 6.4. Stage 3 – If a student does not respond at Stage 2 or fails to return to study on an agreed date, the student will be sent a letter signed by the DoSE advising that their continued registration has been referred to the School Student Progress Committee



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(SSPC) and may result in their permanent withdrawal from the course. If no further contact or explanation for absence is received, the SSPC will authorise the permanent withdrawal of the student from the course. The SSPC will confirm its decision in writing to the student following the meeting. Students will have the right to appeal any decision to recommend permanent withdrawal made by the SSPC.