

Student Attendance and Engagement Monitoring Process Guidance 2021/22

Background:

This guidance document updates that of the 2020/21 academic year and aims to support the processes behind the [Attendance, Engagement and Absence Policy for Taught Students](#). This document emphasises an expected return to recording attendance at meaningful contacts (e.g. teaching sessions) given the University's anticipated default mode of teaching in 2021/22 will be in-person. It does this whilst also looking to retain some of the positive aspects of the engagement and attendance processes in 2020/21, such as the inclusion of engagement monitoring via the Canvas VLE and the use of the Sussex Mobile App for recording attendance. As we look ahead to potential new student information management systems in the future retaining and emphasising these positive aspects is likely to be an aim.

The monitoring process must address the following priority areas: UKVI Student Visa¹ compliance and identifying students who may require welfare and/or academic support.

Process:

Attendance: Attendance at elements of direct engagement/'meaningful contacts' (e.g. seminars, lectures, Academic Advising meetings, Student Life Centre engagements, etc.), both in-person and on-line contacts should 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 by providing a consistent evidence base;
- Ensure compliance with Student Visa requirements, where relevant;
- Ensure compliance with conditions of funding for students, where relevant.

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. This can be useful to support a broader understanding of student engagement with learning, beyond attendance, and can be used to support attendance data (e.g. for SSPCs) or could serve as a trigger for investigating attendance data (as an addition to attendance monitoring). Current tools for monitoring Canvas engagement are limited as it is theoretically possible for someone to log on each week and not actually engage with any meaningful study. For students generally it would not be necessary to run Canvas engagement reports; attendance reports would take precedence.

In some cases where a student is needing to study remotely and is unable to access live on-line teaching (e.g. due to time-zone differences), subject to UKVI guidance noted below, it may be necessary to run Canvas engagement reports as the primary means of monitoring these students' engagement. This should be for a limited time as students will be encouraged to join in-person as soon as they are able to. Students that are needing to study remotely should indicate as such during the registration process; this should also be a limited number as the approved reasons for studying remotely will be limited.

¹ From 5 October 2020, the Home Office introduced a new Student Route immigration system, replacing the previous Tier 4 route. All references to Student Route or Student Visa in this document apply equally to those students who still hold a Tier 4 visa.

Depending upon the numbers of students needing to study remotely for a limited time, who are also not able to access live on-line teaching, Schools may wish to either:

- a) Run separate Canvas Engagement reports with particular attention to those students know to be in this situation or;
- b) When running standard Attendance reports, cross-check students flagged as having low attendance against those students known to be studying remotely and highlight these in a Canvas engagement report.

UKVI are continuing to allow distance learning, where travel restrictions prevent a student arriving on time. However, from 27 September 2021, once the student has arrived in the UK there must be at least 2 in-person engagements per month. These provisions regarding blended and distance learning are due to expire on 6 April 2022.

For guidance on contacting students and escalation please see the [Attendance, Engagement and Absence Policy for Taught Students](#) (section 15).

Identifying students of concern:

Attendance Reports

- Schools should run regular attendance reports based on attendance registers recording meaningful contacts (e.g. live teaching sessions). Frequency is determined by Schools but is likely to return to pre-Pandemic levels, where this had been reduced in 2020/21. For sponsored international students who are studying in the UK from 27 September 2021 to 6 April 2021, there must be at least 2 face-to-face engagements per month during term time to satisfy Home Office requirements on blended learning.
- Where attendance is below normal School standards ([Attendance, Engagement and Absence Policy for Taught Students](#), section 14) 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.
- Canvas Engagement reports are not, then, required except in the cases of students who are known to be studying remotely for a limited time and are unable to access live teaching. They are, however, seen as positive additions to understanding student engagement generally (in particular for students with low attendance) and Schools may wish to run these alongside Attendance Reports to assess student engagement more widely.
- Where students are not flagged as needing to study remotely and do not attend live teaching sessions, they should be marked Absent as normal.
- Where students are studying in the UK but unable to attend live classes, for instance due to a need to self-isolate and have alerted Schools to this, they should be marked as Absence Notified and supported in their studies (e.g. through accessing teaching recordings, on-line resources and/or making use of tutor and Academic Advisor Office Hours where these are conducted on-line). If teaching is available to students on-line (e.g. through dual-mode or on-line delivery) we would expect attendance, as usual, unless the student is unable to for a permissible reason (e.g. illness).

Canvas Engagement Reports

- Where Schools run Canvas Engagement Reports these can be done 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).
- Student Route students and all other students are monitored in the same way in this process.

Recording Attendance Registers:

- Attendance should be recorded at 'meaningful contacts', following normal (pre-Pandemic) School definitions, whether these are conducted face-to-face or synchronously on-line. Examples include any live teaching sessions (e.g. lectures, seminars).
- To support mitigation 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 then 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 can be found [here](#)) – developmental work has been undertaken on the App to improve functionality;
- 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).

For synchronous on-line sessions, using a Zoom participant list or the Sussex App with PIN (a) would be exemplar options.

Appendix A:

Summary of current 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.

Temporary Covid-19 concessions relating to distance and blended learning:

The Home Office revised their Covid-19 concessions guidance for sponsors on 1 July 2021. This extended permission for sponsored international students to study by distance learning if their arrival is delayed due to travel restrictions. Such students must transition to face-to-face learning when they arrive in the UK, which must be no later than by 06 April 2022.

Guidance on blended learning has been introduced. From 27 September 2021 onwards, sponsors will not be able to provide tuition which is delivered entirely remotely to sponsored students who are undertaking their studies within the UK. In-person learning must take place at least twice per month during term time, on a rolling four-week basis.

This concession about blended learning is due to end on 6 April 2022. There is no current provision within the Home Office guidance for anything other than in-person learning beyond 6 April 2022.

Sources of Home office information:

Home Office Sponsor Guidance (paras 7.13 to 7.33 cover engagement monitoring):
[student sponsor guidance, document 2 sponsorship duties \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Covid-19 concessions (paras 2.10 to 2.17 cover blended and distance learning):
[Covid-19: Guidance for Student sponsors, migrants and Short-term students \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)