

University of Sussex

Attendance, Engagement and Absence Policy for Taught Students

Introduction

Poor attendance and engagement can put students at risk academically. The University monitors attendance and engagement in order to ensure students are successfully progressing, and to be supportive and anticipatory in its approach to carrying out its duty of care to all students. The University aims to ensure that 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.

Underpinning Principles

- Students need to attend and engage in order to progress in their field of study, and a range of services are available to support students in this
- Good attendance and engagement are essential to a good student experience
- Students are active participants in ensuring their own success
- Identifying poor attendance and engagement early, and intervening early, are key to helping students progress
- All students are given a fair and equal opportunity to demonstrate academic achievement in accordance with the University's institutional Regulations and Examination and Assessment Regulations.

Requirements of External Bodies

Good student attendance and engagement is also a requirement of external bodies such as Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), funders (e.g. U.S. Department of Education who administer Federal Direct Loans) and the UK Visas and Immigration department of the Home Office.

The University is able to deliver courses, administer loans and scholarships to students, and grant Tier 4 sponsorship, by fulfilling its responsibilities in relation to these bodies.

Any sanctions for poor attendance and engagement for students benefitting from arrangements with these bodies will be the same as for other students, however further consequences could mean withdrawal of sponsorship or funding, and/or the student being required to return to their home country. Notes on any specific requirements are included in this policy.

Further information on Tier 4 for staff can be found on the Compliance web pages <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/academicregistry/academic-registrars-office/compliance> and information for international students can be found on the International Student Support pages www.sussex.ac.uk/internationalstudent/immigration
[The Student Life Centre can provide advice on loans and scholarships](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/studentlifecentre/funding/)
<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/studentlifecentre/funding/>

Attendance and engagement requirements

Students are expected to attend the University or engage as is necessary to progress in their studies and complete their course.

All staff are expected to familiarise themselves with this document, and are expected to provide students with information to support their attendance and engagement.

Attendance and engagement records

1. Schools determine the types of contacts they monitor to enable them to assess whether a student is engaged with their studies. These will be meaningful contacts (and should include core modules) and should be sufficient for the student to engage well and be able to progress in their discipline. These contacts comprise attending formal academic classes but also pastoral support activities. Not all activities are monitored by all Schools, and not all need to be monitored; relevant activities should be determined by Schools.

A list of activities that could be considered as monitored contact points is provided below:

- i. a lesson, lecture, tutorial, laboratory session, workshop or seminar;
 - ii. an assessment session as required in the module handbook;
 - iii. an interaction with a supervisor, tutor or adviser (this can be for academic or pastoral advice related to progressing with studies);
 - iv. a research-method or research-panel meeting, writing-up seminars or doctoral workshops;
 - v. an oral examination (viva); or
 - vi. submitting (for PGT students, Schools would monitor whether students have submitted their dissertation title on time. If they have not met this deadline, staff would follow up with the student's tutor or academic adviser. As this is the only expected contact after the end of teaching, submission of the dissertation title would be sufficient to confirm engagement);
 - vii. assessed or unassessed coursework; or
 - viii. an interim dissertation, coursework or report;
 - ix. registration (for enrolment or matriculation);
 - x. a meeting related to appeal or disciplinary.
2. Schools must be able to produce reports showing the frequency of student attendance/engagement at monitored contact points. Schools will have their own defined procedures and nominated monitoring personnel in place.
 3. Taught students are responsible for engaging with the method of attendance-recording used by the University, and are required to ensure their attendance is noted either via systems or by staff. Where it is the responsibility of academic staff to ensure attendance records are complete, School administrative staff should flag any incomplete or incorrect records to those staff to ensure records are accurate.

4. Attendance/engagement recording is still required when students are at a different location in the following circumstances:
 - i. on work placements: learning logs record engagement and Schools will have their own nominated personnel in place to ensure monitoring. Schools should refer to the Careers and Employability Centre for guidance where required.
 - ii. on field work or field trips: Schools will have their own defined procedures and nominated personnel in place to ensure monitoring.
5. Sussex students spending a year studying abroad as part of a visiting or exchange programme must adhere to any of their host institution's engagement requirements, but are not routinely monitored by University of Sussex unless they are a Tier 4 student. Tier 4 students who are studying abroad have their engagement monitored by the Sussex Abroad Office in liaison with the Student Systems and Records Office (SSRO) and the Head of the Office of Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulations (OSCAR).

Identifying Poor Attendance and Engagement

Schools should run reports at regular review points during each term¹ to identify ('flag') students who have missed monitored contact points. Some Schools (such as Science Schools) may run reports more frequently where students are expected to make a high number of monitored contacts in any given week. A student may be 'flagged' in the following ways:

- When their attendance and engagement gives cause for concern (e.g. is below expected levels²)
- If the conditions and responsibilities of a learning agreement are not met (e.g. when students are on a repeat year)

Contact, Reporting and Withdrawal

After Schools have run reports on monitored contact points, they should contact students whose attendance or engagement is considered unsatisfactory.

Schools should contact students in stages:

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

¹ Reports may be run at different points in the Autumn term (to accommodate late arrivals etc.) to the Spring term.

² Schools may run attendance reports at varying levels to give the most meaningful data.

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.

Note about Tier 4 students with poor attendance/engagement levels:

Tier 4 students should be flagged and contacted in line with the guidance in 'Identifying Poor Attendance and Engagement' and 'Contact, Reporting and Withdrawal' sections. It is expected that this level of monitoring would flag any student at risk of missing 10 or more consecutive monitored contact points without an authorised absence (which is the measure of poor engagement used by UKVI). Tier 4 students who are considered by SSPCs are flagged to SSRO after the meeting. SSRO may contact them and if necessary initiate the withdrawal process in liaison with the School, the Head of OSCAR and the Director for the Student Experience (and the Sussex Abroad Office where appropriate). Withdrawal of Tier 4 students are reported to UKVI within 10 days of formal confirmation of the withdrawal.

Authorised Absences

1. Schools must provide clear information to students on how they can report an absence and students should be encouraged to get in touch if they are unable to attend and engage with their course.
2. Student absences of up to 6 days³ may be considered 'authorised' if the student notifies the University in accordance with School guidance.
3. Students who are (or were) unable to attend or engage for more than 6 days due to illness, incapacity, emergency or other valid reason, should inform the School Director of Student Experience (DOSE) via the School Office or other appropriate channel, and a medical certificate, or suitable alternative evidence, must be obtained and sent to the DOSE. In these circumstances the DOSE may:
 - a. authorise the absence, and the student and DOSE should agree future engagement expectations or a return to study plan if required, to ensure that the student can continue on their current programme of study. If a medical certificate is not provided, or the DOSE is not satisfied with the evidence provided, the absence may not be authorised.

³ In accordance with the University Regulations, Regulation 16, paragraph 30.

- b. Liaise with the Director for the Student Experience in Professional Services, or their deputy, to consider if the University's Fitness to Study Policy should be implemented.
4. In circumstances where a student's absence is expected to prevent them from progressing on their current course, the School Student Progress Committee should liaise with the Student Life Centre and the SSRO in relation to temporarily or permanently withdrawing the student (TWD or PWD).

Note about Tier 4 students with extended absences:

When a School becomes aware that a Tier 4 student will not be able to resume their studies after **60 days**, they must contact SSRO at the earliest opportunity. In these circumstances if it is agreed between SSRO and the School that a student is temporarily or permanently withdrawn (TWD or PWD), sponsorship (as defined by UKVI) will be withdrawn.

In exceptional circumstances, such as serious illness or injury, the University may continue to sponsor a student for longer than 60 days providing this is agreed with both the DOSE and the Director for the Student Experience in the Professional Services (or deputy), and the student can still complete their course within their existing visa when they resume their studies. SSRO will liaise with the Head of OSCAR and Director for the Student Experience in relation to any such student withdrawals and may notify the Student Funding Team or Sussex Abroad Office where appropriate.

Students should be referred to student services such as International Student Support or the Student Life Centre for non-academic advice.

The role of School Student Progress Committees (SSPCs)

School Student Progress Committees are chaired by the Director of Student Experience (DOSE) and have overall responsibility for monitoring engagement within the School.

Terms of reference for SSPCs are set out in The Organisation of the University and procedures for the withdrawal of students are also detailed in the Regulations. The following is additional to this formal guidance, and is intended to act as a framework for good practice to complement this attendance, monitoring and engagement policy.

Which student cases should SSPCs consider?

The Committee should consider all students who have been flagged to have poor attendance and engagement in line with the guidance in this policy, as well as monitoring students who have a learning agreement or return to study plan, to ensure that they are adhering to this. Temporary and permanent withdrawal rates should also be considered. The SSPC should provide a report for the School Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC) on all permanently and temporarily withdrawn students including those students who have requested permanent withdrawal or temporary interruption of studies themselves. Reports should include data on the student profile to allow analysis across the University.

In addition, issues relating to student welfare and the student experience should be identified for referral to the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

SSPCs cannot agree interim awards when permanently withdrawing candidates. These students will be noted at the next PAB which has the authority to grant exit awards where applicable. In addition, SSPCs cannot agree a return to study date when confirming temporary withdrawal for a candidate or for a candidate who has voluntarily temporarily

withdrawn. In all cases, the PAB confirms the return to study date, following a recommendation from the School DOSE based on consultation with the candidate.

What outcomes are available to the SSPC?

SSPCs have a number of options available to them when considering individual student cases. The Committee could:

- require the student to permanently withdraw;
- require the student to temporarily withdraw with or without conditions on return (in line with standard withdrawal deadlines⁴);
- allow continued registration with conditions;
- allow continued registration without conditions where the student's attendance and engagement has already improved significantly and the student has provided an acceptable explanation for serious past absences/poor engagement

Where a student is temporarily withdrawn, or conditions are imposed, the student and their DOSE should always agree a return to study plan or learning agreement to help the student resume their studies. The standard learning agreement template for students on a repeat of their first year should be used. Conditions could also include the following:

- a specified attendance requirement;
- referral to and engagement with other university support services as appropriate;
- referral to and engagement with workshops such as study skills or time management.

How are the outcomes of the SSPC communicated?

Outcomes of the SSPC should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting and reported to the Student Systems and Records Office (SSRO), the Student Funding Team (in the Student Life Centre) and the Sussex Abroad Office. Where a student has been allowed to continue on a course, Schools must write to the student (via email and hard copy letter) to confirm the outcome of the meeting. Where a decision has been taken to temporarily or permanently withdraw a student, SSRO will then inform the student in writing of the SSPC decision, and advise them of the appeal period. SSRO will also write to confirm the return to study date agreed by the PAB and advise them of the appeal period in relation to the PAB decision. SSRO should liaise with the Head of OSCAR in relation to UKVI matters where appropriate.

Can students attend the SSPC?

In reviewing students that have been flagged to have poor attendance and/or engagement it may be necessary to invite individual students to the SSPC to enable them to present their case. A student who is invited to attend should be given at least two weeks' notice. They can attend the meeting in person to present their evidence and are entitled to be accompanied but not to be represented. If the student is unable to attend the meeting they can submit evidence for consideration in their absence. Student Life Centre staff cannot attend SSPC meetings with a student.

Can a decision of the SSPC be challenged?

A student required by the SSPC to withdraw from the University shall have the right to appeal. Details about the appeals process can be found on the Academic Appeals web pages <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ogs/complaintsappeals/academic>

⁴ Please see the Examination and Assessment Regulations