Policy and Guidance on Student Attendance and Absence from Study

This document sets out the University’s policy and expectations with regard to student attendance, attendance monitoring and absence from study. It provides associated guidance for staff and students, in order to ensure a consistent and supportive approach across the University when responding to students’ requests to be absent from study.

1. University Policy on Student Attendance
   a) The University does not have an over-arching compulsory attendance policy.
   b) Nevertheless, under the terms of the University’s General Regulations, students are, except for absence with good cause, expected to attend all elements of their programme of study, including lectures, seminars, tutorials, practicals, laboratory work, language classes, performances, fieldwork and examinations.
   c) The University’s expectations of student attendance are set out in the General Regulations (section A 4) and in the pre-registration documentation sent to students and further information is available on the Student Progress Service website.
   d) All international students must maintain an overall attendance record of at least 80% in order to comply with the Home Office UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) section requirements for Tier 4 study visa holders. International students whose attendance falls below 80% must be reported to the Home Office (UKVI) and their visa may be terminated. Information on compliance for Tier 4 Visa Holders including the attendance regulations for Tier 4 Visa holders, is available on the Student Progress Service website.
   e) Some programmes include key or compulsory modules, attendance at which may be essential in order to meet professional accreditation or Fitness to Practise requirements. Details are provided in the relevant programme regulations and handbooks.
   f) A student who is not able to attend University should inform their School/ Institute and submit a Student Notice of Absence form. Submission of a Student Notice of Absence Form is not compulsory but any absence noted by the School/Institute may be recorded as ‘unauthorised’ if it has not been agreed and endorsed in advance. For absences owing to ill health of longer than 7 days, a student must also submit a medical certificate.

2. Student Attendance Monitoring
   a) Although there is no over-arching compulsory attendance policy, the University does have an agreed Policy on Attendance Monitoring, which states that all academic programmes of study must have systems in place to ensure that all students are engaging satisfactorily with the programme.
   b) The aims of the Policy on Attendance Monitoring are to:
      • Enable the University to monitor the attendance of international students, in order to comply with the Home Office (UKVI) requirements and maintain the University’s status as a sponsor of international Tier 4 student visa holders.
      • Ensure that Home and International students are treated fairly and consistently
      • Enable the timely identification of students whose attendance record or patterns suggest that they may be at risk of failing to progress, so that follow-up measures can be put in place to support students and encourage engagement with the programme.
c) Compliance with the Policy requires:

**For (Undergraduate and Postgraduate) Taught students**
- Attendance at a minimum of one monitored event / contact point per 2 weeks on average throughout each semester.

**For Postgraduate Research students**
- A minimum of one supervisor meeting per month, recorded in e-Portfolio, in line with the Code of Practice.

d) Student attendance is monitored in all subject areas and attendance records are maintained. In some subjects, attendance is monitored at the majority of sessions; in other subjects, attendance may be monitored less frequently (at identified ‘monitored events’).

e) Attendance is currently monitored largely by the circulation of class lists for signature (supplemented in some cases by the use of hand-held smart-card scanners). Technologies to support more efficient collection of attendance data are currently being developed.

f) The Policy is reviewed periodically.

3. **The possible implications of absence from study**

a) Frequent absence from study can have significant implications. If students do not attend regularly, this is likely to have a negative impact on their progress and achievements.

b) **It is particularly important that all international students attend their classes or notify their School/Institute of any necessary absence.** As noted above, the Home Office (UKVI) policy means that all international students must maintain an overall attendance of 80%. The University must report to the Home Office any international students who do not meet the minimum attendance level. If international students are absent from classes this could lead to termination of their visa. This means that international students have less choice about whether to attend, as their visa is at risk if they do not demonstrate adequate attendance.

c) **Individual degree programmes / Schools may have attendance expectations that are more demanding** than the over-arching expectations in the University’s General Regulations. For example, in some subjects, it may be that students have to maintain a good record of attendance in order to meet professional accreditation requirements. In some subject areas (eg Medicine, Dentistry) poor attendance may mean that Fitness to Practise thresholds are breached, in which case the School would have to investigate because of the implications for progression and patient safety. This also means that a School may need to advise students about the implications of a specific request for absence from study, in order to protect their Fitness to Practise record.

d) Whilst there are no ‘sanctions’ relating to individual instances of unauthorised absence, a poor overall attendance record can have serious consequences relating to the student’s academic performance, progression, professional accreditation or Fitness to Practise. In the event of serious failure to attend classes, the ultimate outcome could be academic sanctions or even termination of study on the grounds of failure to make satisfactory progress (see the Undergraduate Progress Regulations (section G 24(c)); Postgraduate Taught Regulations (Section F 17 (c)).

[Note: progress / attendance requirements for Research students are different- they are available here: MPhil Progress Regulations (section K); and PhD Progress Regulations (Section L)]
4. **Guidance for students who need to be absent from study**

There are many valid reasons why a student might need to be absent from study on occasion, and these guidelines are intended to support and advise students in these circumstances.

i. A student who is not able to attend University for any reason is requested to inform their School / Institute by submitting an online **Student Notice of Absence Form**. For absences longer than 7 days, a student must also submit a medical certificate. (For students of Medicine and Dentistry, completion and hand-in of a PDF form is required, rather than an online submission.)

ii. The online system enables the School to ‘authorise’ the absence. In this context, ‘authorise’ means that School is aware of the absence and endorses or supports it.

iii. Submission of a Student Notice of Absence Form is not compulsory (though it is good, professional practice). However, if a student’s absence is recorded as a result of attendance monitoring, but has not been notified to the School and agreed in advance, this will be recorded as an ‘unauthorised’ absence and may trigger follow-up if the student has a pattern of poor attendance.

iv. By ‘authorising’ absence, the School / Institute is supporting and endorsing the absence, and saying that the absence is not considered, at the time of authorisation, to pose a particular educational risk to the student’s progression. Nevertheless, it is the student’s responsibility to make up any time or learning lost as a result of the absence, and students should be aware that it may not be possible or practicable for the School to assist with this or repeat certain compulsory sessions.

v. As a general principle, Schools / Institutes will seek to support and endorse an absence requested for good reason. If the School does not ‘authorise’ the request for absence, this could be for one or more significant reasons: for example, the student might have already made a large number of requests for absence; the School might consider that the student is at risk of falling below a specific attendance threshold (eg for Fitness to Practise); the class or session might be compulsory, with serious implications if the student is absent; the student might be considered at risk of not progressing because of repeated absences.

vi. It is good practice for students to give as much notice as possible of expected absences. This enables the School/Institute to plan for the absence and may allow for the provision of alternative arrangements or supplementary materials. Of course, not all necessary absences can be planned for in advance, and Schools/Institutes will generally understand and support this.

5. **Guidance for staff in academic Schools / Units who are asked about absence from study**

Colleagues in academic units are often approached by individual students who wish or need to be absent from their studies for various valid reasons (including, but not limited to: sport, family commitments, bereavement, medical appointments, extra-curricular activities, faith or religious observance). These guidelines are intended to assist academic colleagues in considering such requests.

Students are not obliged to request authorisation of their proposed absence; and academic colleagues are not obliged to agree to such absence. Nevertheless, where students do opt to seek permission to be absent, the general principle underpinning this guidance is that this should not be withheld unreasonably. Colleagues approached by students to request absence for good reason are encouraged to consider the matter in a sympathetic and supportive way, on an individual basis, bearing in mind that:
i. By ‘authorising’ absence, colleagues are indicating that they do not feel that there is a particular educational risk to the student’s progression at the point when the absence is authorised.

ii. Occasional absences should not usually cause a major problem, but individual requests should be considered in the context of all other absences, the student’s overall attendance record and any particular subject-specific requirements.

iii. Concerns about the student’s overall attendance record, and other considerations such as professional accreditation or Fitness to Practise, may make it difficult for colleagues to give unqualified positive support to every request.

vii. Students should be advised that, whether or not their absence is formally ‘authorised’, it is the student’s responsibility to make up any time / learning lost as a result of the absence, and students should be advised that it may not be possible or practicable for the School/Institute to assist with this or repeat certain compulsory sessions.

viii. It is expected that (where possible) students will give reasonable notice of their intended absence and in some subjects, it may be necessary to give significant advance notice of pre-planned absence requests. Necessary absences can, however, not always be planned for in advance, and Schools/Institutes should generally understand and support this.

iv. If colleagues decide not to support or endorse a student’s request for absence, they cannot prevent a student from being absent, but they and the student note that it is at the student’s own educational risk, in the knowledge of the possible implications (progression, overall record of attendance, course implications, Fitness to Practise etc).

v. In the case of International students, the consequence of unauthorised absence(s) could be termination of the student’s visa if he/she does not meet the minimum attendance threshold for compliance with the Home Office (UKVI) requirements.

6. **Guidance for staff and students on Absence from Study on Grounds of Religion, Belief or Faith Observance**

   Over and above the general guidelines outlined above, the following principles and guidelines are offered in the context of requests for absence for religious observance:

i. In the context of a diverse student population, in which many faiths are represented, it is impossible to generalise about the individual needs and expectations of students in terms of religion, belief and faith observance. The approach taken by a student is typically very personal and individual, and requests for absence from study should therefore be considered in this light.

ii. It is absolutely not the University’s intention to discourage or prevent any student from fulfilling his or her religious observance requirements or choices. Individual requests should generally be considered in a positive and supportive manner, as recommended above.

iii. International students must be advised that they are responsible for ensuring that they meet attendance requirements for visa purposes, especially if they are requesting leave of absence in order to attend a religious event lasting a number of days.

iv. In the case of requests where there is any concern or doubt about giving positive support for absence from study (eg because of the student’s record of attendance, or concerns about professional accreditation or Fitness to Practise), advice may be sought from the relevant University Chaplain (see [contact details for the Chaplaincy](#)). The Chaplain will be able to
provide more information and interpretation about the specific requirements and may be able to help the School and the student to reach a mutually agreeable approach.

7. **Guidance for staff and students on Absence from Study for Sporting Commitments**

The general approach and guidelines described above are also applicable in the case of 1st Team athletes within the performance sports clubs, for whom a significant issue is attendance at away fixtures on Wednesday afternoons. The geographical location of many fixtures (eg Loughborough, Nottingham, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Sheffield, Liverpool and Manchester) means that team athletes may have to leave Newcastle early in the morning, thus missing scheduled morning classes.

In order that 1st team athletes can attend such away fixtures, whilst also safeguarding their academic progress and, in the case of international students, maintaining a robust attendance record for immigration / visa compliance purposes, the following procedure and guidelines apply:

i. Students who are 1st Team athletes within performance sports clubs should at the start of the year let their Degree Programme Director or Senior Tutor know that they may need to request permission to be absent for some away fixtures.

ii. To facilitate this process, the Centre for Physical Recreation and Sport (CPRS) will send a list of performance clubs and their respective 1st Team playing members and fixtures electronically to all School Managers. This will ensure that any request can be checked for validity.

iii. For each requested absence, the student should submit an online **Student Notice of Absence Form** in the normal way, indicating clearly the reason for the request. This request should be submitted at least five working days prior to the date of the away fixture concerned.

iv. The DPD / Tutor concerned will consider the request and advise the student of the decision in the normal manner.

v. Whilst permission / support should not be withheld unreasonably, individual decisions should take account of the cumulative impact of several periods of absence (which may affect the same module / session each time) on overall academic progress of the student; and the implications for the attendance record of international students who are subject to immigration / visa compliance requirements. Consideration should also be given to the student’s overall record of attendance and any implications for professional accreditation or Fitness to Practise.

vi. As a general guide, it is recommended that a maximum of six absences for sporting commitments should be permitted in any one academic year (for students without visa restrictions) and a maximum of three absences for international students holding a Tier 4 visa.

vii. The decision of the Academic Unit will be final.

Schools are advised to contact CPRS directly for confirmation if in any doubt: Fraser Kennedy – Fraser.Kennedy@ncl.ac.uk / ext. 87224