

University Policy on Student Attendance Monitoring



Introduction and context

An appropriate level of engagement of all students with their programme of study is important and has a direct impact on their success. Sufficient attendance at relevant classes is a strong indicator of engagement, and is also essential for international students who have a Tier 4 visa, to ensure visa compliance. It is therefore important for the University to undertake effective and efficient monitoring of student engagement and be able to produce and analyse attendance data in a timely manner.

The monitoring of relevant international students' engagement with their studies is a requirement by the Home Office UK Visa and Immigration division (UKVI) for the University to maintain its Tier 4 Sponsor Licence as a sponsor of international student Tier 4 visa holders. Loss of this status, and hence the ability to admit international students, would be extremely detrimental to the University and would constitute a significant financial and reputational risk.

It is an important principle of this Policy that Home and International students should not be treated differently in terms of attendance monitoring (though follow-up may be different for international Tier 4 visa holders because of the UKVI requirements).

Monitoring of student attendance is important for pedagogic and pastoral reasons, enabling the timely identification of students who may be at risk in terms of progression or retention. Follow-up actions can then be taken to support students and encourage engagement with the programme.

Revised University Policy on Student Attendance Monitoring for the 2020/21 Academic Year as a result of COVID-19 disruption

Due to restrictions imposed by Covid-19 safe-guarding and social-distancing, the University requires programmes to adopt a more flexible approach to monitoring student interaction with learning activities and may have to be a combination of attendance and engagement to provide schools with this information.

On the 29 July 2020 University Education Committee approved that taught programmes would use a mixed model approach for student attendance monitoring of:

- i. Present-in-Person timetabled events: record student attendance in the usual manner, via room scanners, where attendance at events will be recorded by the SAMS system for those students who attend in Newcastle.
- ii. Reports run from Canvas to monitor on-going engagement with on-line programme provision, where "zero activity" reports indicate students who have not interacted.
- iii. Where appropriate, such as events based in rooms without attendance scanners, Academic Units can choose to make use of attendance lists to manually record attendance and input these into SAP.

Schools can use a combination of the information provided by the reports to make a judgement on whether a student is not interacting with the teaching provided. In such circumstances, school colleagues should send emails from the Student Attendance Monitoring System (SAMS) to correspond with students about the importance of engagement, and identify students who may require additional wellbeing support.

International students residing and studying in the UK who appear, through lack of interaction with their programme, to have withdrawn from their studies may be reported to the Home Office and this is likely to result in the curtailment of their visa.

Note: for the 20/21 Academic year 'Attendance' in the policy document means 'attendance and engagement'

The Policy

- a) All academic programmes of study must have monitoring arrangements in place to ensure that all students are engaging satisfactorily with the programme.
- b) The aims of the University Policy on Attendance Monitoring are to:
- Enable the University to monitor the attendance of international students holding a Tier 4 visa, 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, or of breaching their visa compliance requirements, 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 monitored at a minimum* of one event / contact point per week on average throughout each semester.

* The use of smartcard scanners to record attendance facilitates frequent recording of attendance without the administrative burden of signed class lists. More frequent monitoring of attendance leads to a more accurate picture of the student's engagement and may reduce the need for follow-up.

For Postgraduate Research* students

- Attendance monitored at one supervisor meeting per month, in line with the Code of Practice (this should be recorded in e-Portfolio) throughout the 12-month cycle (recording a minimum of 10 formal interactions per annum).

* PGR Occasional Students with a Tier 4 Visa should record in e-Portfolio a monthly meeting with their academic contact at Newcastle University (normally named in their Postgraduate Offer Letter).

- d) Student attendance is monitored in all subject areas and attendance records are maintained. Monitoring patterns may vary: in some subjects, attendance is monitored at the majority of sessions or classes; in other subjects, attendance may be monitored less frequently, in accordance with the minimum policy requirements. For block teaching, where a module is condensed over a shorter period, it may be appropriate to have more frequent / intense monitoring. Monitored sessions or classes are normally agreed in advance* for each programme of study.

*In certain circumstances it may be necessary to modify the agreed monitored events retrospectively (after the start of the semester), for example when some classes are designated 'optional' or when one or more classes are cancelled.

- e) Attendance on taught programmes is typically recorded by fixed smart-card scanners on entry to lecture theatres, classrooms or laboratories (or in some cases by circulation and signature of class lists or by mobile scanners). Students are responsible for ensuring, in person, that their attendance is recorded, and should scan their smartcard every time they enter a classroom which has a scanner.
- f) Attendance data for the agreed monitored events* for the programme of study concerned is retained in the Student Attendance Monitoring System (SAMS) for a total of two years (the year of monitoring plus one year). It is permanently deleted after two years.

*In addition, data from all recorded 'smartcard swipes' is retained for up to one year and can be interrogated, if necessary, to demonstrate attendance of an individual above and beyond the agreed monitored events. This may be important (eg to protect a student's Tier 4 study visa) if it is necessary to demonstrate sufficient engagement with a programme where the attendance data for monitored events gives cause for concern. It may also be necessary to modify the agreed monitored events retrospectively (after the start of the semester) in which case the recorded scans will demonstrate attendance.

- g) Attendance data recorded in SAMS is used primarily for the purposes of attendance monitoring, in order to comply with this policy and to:
- Enable the University to monitor the attendance of international Tier 4 visa holders, in accordance with the Home Office (UKVI) requirements.
 - Enable the timely identification of students whose attendance record or patterns suggest that they

may be at risk of failing to progress.

The use of students' personal data is subject to the provisions of the [Policy on the Use of Students' Personal Information](#). Personal attendance data recorded in SAMS should not be used or shared for purposes beyond these provisions unless there is an identified necessity.

Subject to the specific approval of the relevant Dean, in individual disciplines where this is deemed to be necessary (e.g. for the purposes of professional references where information about attendance is explicitly requested), attendance data may be used to inform general statements about attendance provided this information is shared in advance with the student / graduate concerned. Further guidance is available separately.

- h) Where the attendance of an international Tier 4 visa holder gives cause for concern (e.g. by falling below 80% at identified taught monitored events), this will trigger a sequence of follow-up contacts with the student in order to check whether any support or further advice are required. The University is obliged to report to the Home Office (UKVI) any Tier 4 visa holder who fails, without good cause, to attend the programme, and this is likely to result in the termination of the student's visa. Further information and guidance about attendance thresholds and the processes for follow-up and reporting is provided separately.
- i) Where the attendance of a Home / EU student falls below the agreed attendance threshold for a particular programme of study, this will trigger a sequence of follow-up contacts with the student to check whether any support or further advice are required. For Home / EU students, academic units may determine an attendance threshold appropriate to their discipline (typically 50% or above).
- j) This policy and the associated expectations, guidelines and procedures fall within the over-arching provisions of the University's Regulations and relevant student procedures (e.g. those relating to appeals, complaints and discipline).
- k) This Policy is reviewed periodically (normally every three years). Most recent full review: May 2017.

Approved by University Education Committee, for use in the 2020/21 Academic year, August 2020.