

Name of committee:	Student Experience Sub-Committee					
Title of paper:	Student Engagement Monitoring Policy with Notification of Absence Procedure and Guidance					
Purpose of the paper:						
For information	X	For discussion	X	For recommendation		For approval
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Date of paper:	14 th April 2023					

1. Purpose of the paper	
To report to Student Experience Sub-Committee the revised policy for use in monitoring student attendance and engagement in the 2023/24 Academic Year, this includes;	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Student Engagement Monitoring Policy ii. The Student Sickness and Absence Procedure iii. The Student Engagement Monitoring and Absence from Study FAQs 	
2. Key issues addressed in the paper:	
The revised policy and guidance:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides students (both taught and research) and colleagues with updated information on the process to be followed for monitoring student engagement on programme of studies. • Provides clearer guidance on absence from studies requests. • Has been rewritten to provide more student focused version, in line with other student policies and procedures. 	
3. Recommendations:	
The contents of this paper are provided to the committee for information on the revised policy and guidance.	
4. Consultation to date (including any previous committee consideration and its outcome):	
Feedback on the policy and guidance during review was sought from key stakeholders including central services, colleagues in schools / faculties and representatives of the Students Union.	
5. Further committee consideration/approvals required:	
Request for Student Experience Sub-Committee agreement for use of the revised policy and guidance in the 2023/24 Academic Year	
6. Resourcing implications:	
n/a	
7. Is the paper to be closed? (If yes, please state the reason below):	No

Student Engagement Monitoring Policy

Effective from 1 September 2023

This policy should be read in conjunction with the General Regulation (A4) in the [University Regulations](#) and the [Student Sickness and Absence Procedure](#).

1. Purpose

This policy outlines how the University ensures that all students are engaging satisfactorily with their programme of study. Student engagement is monitored in order to:

- Identify students whose attendance pattern or record suggests that they may be at risk of failing to progress, so that supportive follow-up measures can be implemented and to encourage engagement;
- Identify any international students who may be at risk of breaching their visa compliance requirements, so that supportive follow-up measures can be implemented to encourage engagement and ensure that the University complies with Home Office (UK Visa and Immigration) requirements;
- Enable reporting of students who have interrupted or are presumed to have withdrawn from their programmes of study, in line with the external reporting requirements for the Home Office, student loans or individual sponsorship agreements.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all registered Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research students, regardless of fee status, nationality, or location of study.

3. Policy

3.1. Importance of engagement

Engagement is generally measured in terms of student attendance in relevant classes, interaction with online learning materials, and the timely submission of assessed work.

All students are expected to engage with their programme of studies in a way that is appropriate and which maximises their chances of academic success and that except for absence with good cause, expected to attend scheduled teaching events. By monitoring student engagement, the University is able to identify students who may require additional academic support and implement measures to support and encourage engagement.

In addition, monitored engagement is particularly important for international students who have a Student Visa, since the University is required to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the visa. If you are a Student Visa holder and it has been identified that you are not engaging appropriately with your programme of study, the University, as your sponsor, has a responsibility to report this to the Home Office.

3.2. Taught (UG and PGT) students absence

If you have a good reason to be absent from your programme, please see the [Student Sickness and Absence Procedure](#), which outlines what you should do to inform your academic unit of your absence.

Other than where you have notified your school and received an approved absence response from your academic unit of an absence, students are expected to attend all elements of their programme of study.

3.2.1. How engagement on your programme will be monitored

Student attendance at Present in Person (PiP) teaching sessions is normally recorded through fixed smartcard scanners on entry to lecture theatres, laboratories and classrooms, etc. You are responsible for ensuring that your attendance is recorded at any PiP sessions by scanning your smartcard each time you enter a classroom with a scanner.

When you scan your smartcard, this data is logged on University systems and becomes available to the relevant Academic Unit to allow colleagues to identify sessions where students have attended or be recorded as absent.

Where your programme of study includes some on-line learning, your on-line engagement may be monitored by the use of Canvas reports regarding your participation with this teaching provision and related activities.

If you are studying on a taught programme (UG or PGT), engagement is normally monitored at specific events or contact points as determined by the academic unit. These named sessions will be at least once per week throughout each semester, but may include all teaching sessions.

Your academic unit will have chosen an appropriate engagement threshold for your programme of study and will contact you if your attendance falls below this level. The minimum attendance threshold stipulated by Academic Units could be at least 50% of scheduled sessions, although may be higher depending on your programme requirement, for both Home and International students (however, please see [Additional information for International Students](#), below).

3.2.2. Data storage and protection

Attendance data from all smartcard swipes is recorded in the Student Attendance Monitoring System (SAMS) and retained securely for a period of two years (the academic year in which the monitoring takes place, plus one year). The data is stored primarily for the purposes of Engagement Monitoring and in order to comply with the [purposes of this policy](#).

The use of your personal data is subject to the provisions set out within the Student Privacy Notice. Any personal attendance data recorded in SAMS should not be used or shared for any purposes beyond the provisions set out in the [Student Privacy Notice](#), unless there is an identified necessity to do so (in line with the General Data Protection Regulations).

In individual disciplines, it is sometimes necessary to disclose attendance data for the purposes of professional references, where this information is explicitly requested. In these circumstances, and with the approval of the relevant Head of Academic Unit, your attendance data may be used to inform general statements about your attendance. This information will be shared with you in advance of being disclosed to third parties.

3.3. PGR students

Following your registration and collection of your smartcard, engagement of PGR students is monitored through records of confirmed meetings with your supervisor or supervisory team. For full-time students, you should meet with your supervisor or supervisory team at least ten times per year, ensuring that there is a gap of no more than ten weeks between meetings. For part-time students, you should discuss and agree the number of formal interactions with your supervisory team, ensuring that there is a gap of no more than ten weeks between meetings.

You must record your meetings in ePortfolio/NUReflect throughout the 12 month cycle, up to the submission of your thesis.

In addition to regular supervisory meetings, key stages of your programme should also be recorded on ePortfolio/NUReflect. This includes (but is not limited to) milestones such as Induction, Project Approval and Annual Progress Reviews.

If you expect to be absent from the University, you must obtain approval through one of the following routes:

- Completing the 'Absence Request Form' via S3P (for holidays or sickness leave);
- Completing an 'Outside Study Request' (available in the PGR element of the PGR CoP system), if you are planning to undertake Primary Research away from your normal location of study (for example, for fieldwork, data collections, study visits to other libraries/archives/industrial units). You should also complete this form if you are planning to write-up your thesis or complete any corrections from home;
- Requesting an 'Interruption of Studies' through ePortfolio.

3.4. Additional information for International Students

If you are an international student and you hold a Tier 4 or Student visa, you should be aware that the University is obliged to follow certain protocols if you fail to engage with your programme of study without good cause. This includes reporting to the Home Office (UK Visa and Immigration) any students who fail to meet the minimum engagement threshold.

If you are a PGR student holding a Tier 4 or Student visa, you are expected to have regular contact with one member of your supervisory team at least ten times per year (approximately once per month), with gaps of no longer than eight weeks between meetings. This includes any periods of 'extended submission', 'pending submission' (writing-up) or 'under examination' if you continue to reside in the UK.

If you are a PGR Occasional student holding a Tier 4 or Student visa, you are expected to report to your Graduate School on a monthly basis to demonstrate engagement.

Your Graduate School will undertake a confirmed meeting record check at least every three weeks. If, during such checks, the Graduate School notes that you do not have a confirmed meeting recorded within the previous eight weeks, you will be sent a notification email to request that you take action to ensure that you are complying with engagement requirements.

Student Sickness and Absence Procedure

Where illness or other reason prevents you from studying for more than three working days, you should complete an Absence Request Form via your [Student Self Service Portal \(S3P\)](#).

The Absence request form should be used to report sickness or absence to your school for any periods of absence. Although it is not compulsory to complete the form, if a teaching event is monitored and there is no authorised absence request, your absence will be recorded on your record as unauthorised. The [Engagement Monitoring Policy](#) refers.

If illness prevents you from studying for more than seven calendar days, you should obtain a medical certificate from your doctor and forward it to your academic school or tutor/supervisor as soon as possible. In addition, an application for an adjustment to an assessment as a result of personal extenuating circumstances (PEC) can be made, if appropriate.

The Absence Request Form is also used for absences other than for sickness, e.g. time away from the University for personal reasons or masters student summer vacation. You should note that these absence reasons will also require evidence if they will be used to support an application for adjustment to an assessment via PEC.

Completing the form

The form is available on S3P and should be used by all students except Medical and Dental students. See [absence request](#) for advice on completing the form via S3P.

Medical and Dental students should use the Student Absence Request (PDF) form and send it to their academic units. If you're using a MAC please complete the PDF form using Acrobat Reader for Mac which is a free download. If you use a different PDF reader you may experience some problems completing or submitting the form.

Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC)

[The Personal Extenuating Policy & Procedure](#) explains how to seek a reasonable adjustment to assessment, such as, extension, deferral etc. You may submit a self-certification PEC on up to two occasions per Semester (1 & 2), totalling four in an academic year to request a short extension (up to 7 days) to an assessment deadline submission for minor illnesses or distress, without needing to provide medical evidence. Please note, a self-certification PEC cannot be used for examinations, repeat attempts, deferrals or extraordinary assessments.

Confidential Circumstances

If you are reluctant for details of your illness to be made known, even to your tutor, you can provide your tutor a confidential letter in a sealed envelope for the Chair of the PEC Committee or Board of Examiners. This can be addressed as appropriate for the Chair's eyes only.

Absence Request Process

To submit an absence request, please follow the steps below:

- login to S3P and select 'Absence Request'
- to add a new request click '+Add new request'
- select the reason for your absence from the 'absence reason' drop down
- enter the details of your absence
- attach documents or select 'I will submit evidence later'
- tick the declaration and submit

Your new request will appear in the Absence Request Overview in you S3P. You can change or cancel your request from this screen. Any comments from your school will appear in the absence request.

Engagement Monitoring and Absence from Study: Frequently Asked Questions

This document should be read in conjunction with the [Student Engagement Monitoring Policy](#) and the [Student Sickness and Absence Procedure](#). In general, the guidance in this document refers to absences from classes, rather than absences from assessments. For queries relating to absences from assessments, please consult the information regarding [Personal Extenuating Circumstance \(PEC\)](#) and the [Frequently Asked Questions for Personal Extenuating Circumstances](#).

In what circumstances can I request an absence from my programme of study?

We understand that there are many reasons why you may need or wish to be absent from your studies, noting that it may not always be possible for approval to be given depending on the programme activities and reasons for absence.

These include:

- **Unexpected events;** examples include:
 - Periods of illness;
 - Medical appointments;
 - Bereavements;
 - Acute personal or emotional circumstances (such as relationship break-ups);
- **Life events;** examples include:
 - Family or caring commitments;
 - Weddings, funerals, or other key family events;
 - Difficult family situations (such as serious illnesses, family relationship break-ups);
- **Extra-curricular and other personal commitments;** examples include:
 - Faith or religious observances;
 - Sporting commitments (where you are a high performance athlete and/or represent the University as a First Team athlete);
 - Employability-related activities;
 - Music or stage performances.

What is not considered to be 'reasonable' grounds for an absence?

While each absence request will be considered on a case-by-case basis, a 'reasonable' ground for absence is generally considered to be one which you could not have anticipated or planned for. Examples of 'unreasonable' grounds for absence and may not be approved include:

- Holidays during term-time (for taught students), or which fall outside the rules for PGR leave (for research students);
 - Parties or social events;
 - The impact of too much alcohol or other substances;
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- Transport problems (unless you are able to demonstrate that sufficient time has been allowed for your journey, and that the circumstances you experienced were out of your control);
- Repeated or routine requests for absence at the same time every week (unless this is to accommodate necessary healthcare appointments or for essential employment related activity as discussed in advance with your school);
- Noise disturbance in your accommodation;
- Lack of sleep.

Does my Academic Unit need to approve my absence?

Your Academic Unit will consider your absence request on a case-by-case basis and the expectation is that support for your absence will not be withheld unreasonably.

When you submit an absence request, your School can do one of the following:

- **Note and support your absence.** This means that your School doesn't feel that there is a particular educational risk to your progression at the moment, and that your absence is unlikely to cause a major problem for you in terms of your programme of study;
- **Note your absence with advice.** This means that your School recognises that there are concerns about your overall attendance record and/or ability to fulfil any professional responsibilities (such as professional accreditation or Fitness to Practise requirements). Your absence will be noted, along with a record that you have been advised about the potential consequences of the absence. If you choose to be absent having received the advice, this will be at your own educational risk.

Whether or not your absence is supported, it is your responsibility to ensure that you make up any lost learning time as a result of your absence. It is important to note that it may not always be possible for your School to assist with this, or to repeat certain compulsory sessions.

How do I notify my School that I will be absent?

If you know in advance that you need to be absent from your programme of study, you should fill in and submit an Absence Request form, available via the Student Portal (S3P).

Please note: if you are a Medical or Dental student, you should submit a Request of Absence form to your Academic Unit.

What if I don't know in advance that I will be absent?

Where possible, you are expected to give at least 24 hours' notice of your intended absence, however we understand that not all absences can be planned in advance. If you are unaware in advance that you will need to be absent, you should contact your Academic Unit as soon as possible to explain your situation.

If you are absent from your programme of study without informing your Academic Unit, your absence will be recorded as 'unexplained' on your attendance record. A pattern of frequent unexplained absences will likely trigger a follow-up from your Academic Unit to ensure that you have appropriate support around you to engage with your programme of studies. For students who hold a Tier 4 or Student visa who have a pattern of frequent unexplained absences, the University is obliged to take additional steps. *(Please see the below guidance: [Are there any additional requirements if I hold a Tier 4 or Student Visa?](#))*

Are there any additional requirements if I hold a Tier 4 or Student Visa?

If you hold a Tier 4 or Student Visa and you are absent from your programme of study without notifying your School of the reasons (i.e. your absence is 'unexplained'), your visa may be terminated if you do not meet the minimum engagement threshold. If you are a Tier 4 or Student Visa-holder with a pattern of unexplained absences, you will be contacted by your School and the Student Progress Service prior to reporting to the Home Office.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand the minimum attendance expectations in line with your visa requirements and the consequences of poor attendance.

What happens if I need to be absent and I am due to submit an assessment or sit an examination?

If your period of absence will impact your ability to prepare for or sit examinations or submit assessments, you will need to request an adjustment to your assessments through the [Personal Extenuating Circumstances \(PEC\) process](#).

What happens if I need to be absent due to Sporting commitments as a 1st Team athlete?

A significant issue for 1st Team athletes students can be the result of attendance at away fixtures on Wednesday afternoons, which may necessitate you having to leave Newcastle early in the morning, thus missing scheduled morning classes.

Requests for absence for this purpose are considered generally 'reasonable' but will be subject to the discretion of your Academic Unit and the specific activities that have been scheduled. To assist with this:

- If you are a 1st Team athlete within performance sports clubs you should let your Degree Programme Director or Senior Tutor know that you may need to request support for absence for some away fixtures, at the start of the year.
- 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. Academic Unit work closely with the CPRS to check lists are up to date.
- For each requested absence, you should submit an online [Student Notice of Absence Form](#) in the normal way, indicating clearly the reason for your absence and the sport

represented. Your request should be submitted at least 5 days prior to the date of the specific away fixture.

- The designated person in your Academic Unit will consider the request and advise you of their decision in the normal manner.
- Whilst support should not be withheld unreasonably, academic unit decisions will take account of the cumulative impact of several periods of absence (which may affect the same module / session each time); and the implications for the attendance record of international students who are subject to immigration / visa compliance requirements.
- The approach may vary depending on the programme of study. It should be noted that programme commitments would normally take priority, and support for absence may not always be possible.

The decision of the Academic Unit will be final.

What happens if I have several unauthorised absences?

If you attend the timetabled sessions on your programme regularly, a small number of unauthorised absences should not result in any follow up action being taken by your academic unit.

Your academic unit will monitor your engagement at least 3 times each semester against an appropriate threshold for your programme of study, typically attendance at a minimum of 50% of scheduled sessions. Any authorised absences will be not be counted.

If your engagement drops below the threshold for your programme, you will receive an e-mail from your academic unit and these will be logged on your student record. There are 3 levels of concern e-mails –

***Initial concerns** – you will receive this e-mail the first time you drop below the engagement threshold for your programme. This e-mail will remind you about the importance of attending regularly and how to report an absence to your academic unit. It will also signpost you to additional support you may find useful e.g., Student Health and Wellbeing support.*

***Serious concerns** – you will receive this e-mail if your engagement does not improve after receiving the initial concerns e-mail or your engagement falls well below the engagement threshold for your programme. You will be expected to improve your engagement immediately and let your academic unit know if you are encountering any difficulties that are impacting your engagement. You may also be asked to attend a meeting with your tutor or other representative from your academic unit to discuss your engagement.*

***Final concerns** – you will receive this e-mail if your engagement does not improve after receiving previous concern e-mails or for consistently poor engagement on your programme. You will be expected to discuss your engagement with your academic unit and if your engagement does not improve your academic unit will consider taking further action which could include referral to unsatisfactory progress procedures or withdrawal from your programme. If you are an International student studying on a student visa this may impact your UK immigration status and you may be required to leave the UK.*