Introduction

The University has an obligation to ensure that it has accurate records on all students. In particular, for funding and other statutory returns, it is critical that changes in circumstance – such as student transfers of programme or mode of study, withdrawals and leaves of absence – are properly and promptly recorded in the University’s corporate database.

The University has an additional obligation to report to the UK Border Agency (UKBA) such changes that may affect the terms of an international student’s visa. This includes reporting failure to register and reporting most of the key changes noted above, but also includes a requirement to report international student absence from the programme. The trigger to report is when a student ‘misses 10 expected interactions’. For UKBA this generally means physical attendance at lectures, seminars, lab classes, tutorials etc. Although there is some ambiguity about how we may interpret and measure the interactions, UKBA do expect the University to have in place a procedure for assessing attendance. UKBA expect the University to report within 10 days of any change/absence trigger noted above. All categories of international student should be included
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Mechanisms for reporting international student absence

UKBA will require reports of student absence or other change of circumstances to be maintained by the University on their Sponsor Management System (SMS). UKBA permit a limited number of users of their Sponsor Management System. University users for student records are therefore limited to the main undergraduate admission team, the three Graduate Schools and the main Student Progress teams. Admissions teams will use the SMS to issue SMS reference numbers to UF international candidates (known as a visa letter or a CAS - Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies). The Student Progress teams will use the SMS to issue CAS-equivalent documents for current students requiring a visa extension. In addition, the Student Data Officer will use the SMS to report failure to register, changes in circumstance and absence.

Minimum attendance/ monitoring, recording and reporting schedule

Academic units should establish attendance monitoring arrangements for ALL students. It is recognised that some academic units are committed to monitoring student attendance in order to encourage student engagement with the programme. If an academic unit has robust attendance systems that exceed this minimum proposal, there is no need to radically adjust practice.

All academic staff have a responsibility to report to the School / Institute support team on unexpected student absence, particularly at key ‘census’ times in the term.

All support staff with responsibility for student data in central teams and academic units have a responsibility to make sure that changes in circumstance are promptly effected in the system or referred to the appropriate office.

Academic Units should establish an accurate and accessible record of student absences for good cause – e.g. sick notes and leave requests.

Support staff in academic units will collate attendance information, as a minimum, on a particular ‘census’ day(s) – i.e. in the last week of the following months: October, November, January, February, March, May and will action accordingly. In addition, the...
academic unit will ‘take stock’ of student results following each examination / assessment session (i.e. semester 1, semester 2 and resit results). Schools are advised to use key events in the programme such as submission dates, where possible, instead of creating an additional ‘census’ event.

Each case will clearly need to be considered on its merits and particular circumstances, such as research field study, will need to be allowed for. However, in general, where a student was absent without good cause (e.g. sick note or other notified absence), the student should normally be sent an email and required to report to a key contact within 5 days. Occasionally, depending on the circumstances, it may be appropriate to immediately refer the student for exclusion under unsatisfactory progress regulations – i.e. promptly notify the Data Officer and the Concessions team.

**Arrangements for each minimum census are entirely at the discretion of the academic unit** but it is suggested that this should focus on confirming the student’s attendance for a programme – i.e. accounting for the student’s attendance once rather than many times. It is also suggested that any list used should be a very recent extract from SAP or the portal. An audit trail should be maintained of these attendance records for 1 year.

The Student Data Officer will run reports from SAP to identify international students that have not registered and key changes in circumstance for students who did register for the given academic year. At a minimum, these reports will be run in the first week of the following months: October, November, February, March, May, July and August. Before submitting the information to UKBA, the Data Officer will note any information recently provided by academic units and will also briefly consult the concessions team and the visa team.

**Other issues**

At registration, the University will provide an additional statement about the need for students to maintain good contact with their academic unit, report absences etc. This will be particularly highlighted to international students. In addition, all returning international students will be required to swipe their smart card on campus to confirm attendance and be counted as fully registered.

All academic units should note that an international student cannot normally transfer to part time mode – doing so may invalidate their visa. Additionally, no international student should work for more than 20 hours during term time (or most of the summer for postgraduate students) without invalidating their visa. Academic units also need to check that, if they offer a postgraduate student part time employment, it does not take the student over their working hours limit.

**Review**

A review will be undertaken after a year of operation of this policy.

**Further information**

- The University has guidance on managing student sickness, changes in circumstance and concessions and other key information available on the web at [www.ncl.ac.uk/student-progress/staffinfo.HTM](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/student-progress/staffinfo.HTM)
- Key documents about the UK Border Agency requirements are available at [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/managingourborders/pbsdocs/](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/managingourborders/pbsdocs/)
- Additional questions on how the University is approaching its requirements under the points based system can be addressed to the Student Progress Service.

Maggie Donnelly, June 2009