Policy and Guidance on Student Attendance, Attendance Monitoring and Absence from Study

This document sets out the University’s policies and expectations with regard to student attendance, attendance monitoring and absence from study. The appendices provide further guidance and examples.

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, practical classes, laboratory work, language classes, performances, fieldwork and examinations.

c) The University’s student attendance expectations are set out in the General Regulations (Section A 4) and in the pre-registration documentation sent to students. Further information is available on the Student Progress Service website.

d) Students’ engagement with their programme of study is recorded and monitored in accordance with the University Policy on Attendance Monitoring (a summary is provided below).

e) All international students with a Tier 4 study visa should maintain a good attendance record in order to comply with the Home Office UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) section requirements. 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. Information on compliance for Tier 4 Visa Holders is available on the Student Progress Service website and in the University Policy governing University sponsorship, for visa purposes, of international students.

f) Some programmes include key or compulsory modules, which students must attend in order to meet professional accreditation or Fitness to Practise requirements. Details are provided in the relevant programme regulations and handbooks.

g) Students are responsible for ensuring that they understand the expected time commitment (timetabled sessions and private or self-guided study) for engagement with their programme of study. This includes the attendance expectations for their subject and the consequences of poor attendance. Further information is provided in programme handbooks. Students are encouraged to discuss in advance with their Degree Programme Director any other commitments that they anticipate might lead to requests for absence.

h) Students who are not able to attend University for any reason are expected to inform their School/Institute and submit an Absence Request form, available via the Student Portal (S3P) (or the Request for Absence form in the case of students of medicine and dentistry). Failure to do so demonstrates poor academic commitment and, in some subjects, lack of professionalism. Any absence which is not notified will be recorded as unexplained on the student’s attendance record, and may trigger follow-up by the School.

i) For absences owing to ill health of longer than 7 calendar days (i.e. including Saturday / Sunday), a student must also submit a medical certificate.

2. University Policy on Attendance Monitoring (Summary)

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 University has an over-arching Policy on Attendance Monitoring which is reviewed every three years (most recent review May 2017)
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 (from January 2017) facilitates frequent recording of attendance without the administrative burden of signed class lists.

**For Postgraduate Research students**

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

The full version of the [University Policy on Attendance Monitoring](#), together with more detailed guidelines, is available online*.

3. **Absence From Study: Overview, Procedure and Implications**

   a) This policy / guidance does not replace the Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) process, but concerns short-term, individual absences from study. Absences from assessments and / or exams (or absences which impact on the student’s ability to submit an assessment on time and / or sit an exam) are not covered by this policy / guidance. In these circumstances, the student should submit a PEC application which will be considered by the relevant PEC committee. PEC applications will be considered on their merits - a ‘supported’ absence does not automatically lead to support for an associated PEC request.

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

   c) It is particularly important that all international students with a Tier 4 study visa attend their classes or notify their School/Institute of any necessary absence. The University must report to the Home Office any international students who do not demonstrate adequate attendance and 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 engagement with their programme.

   d) 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 externally-set professional accreditation requirements or Fitness to Practise thresholds. Therefore a School may need to advise students about the implications of a specific request for absence, in order to protect the student’s accreditation or Fitness to Practise record. In some disciplines, there is a separate attendance policy which clarifies the attendance expectations and implications of non-attendance.

   e) Students who are not able to attend University for any reason are expected to inform their School/ Institute and submit an Absence Request form, available via the Student Portal (S3P) (or the Request for Absence form in the case of students of medicine and dentistry). Failure to do so demonstrates poor academic commitment and, in some subjects, lack of professionalism.

   f) For absences owing to ill health of longer than 7 calendar days (i.e. including Saturday / Sunday), a student must also submit a medical certificate.

   g) In considering a student’s Notice of Absence form, a member of staff may respond in one of two ways:
The absence is 'Noted and supported'

This means that the absence is duly recorded and supported, given the particular circumstances. These absences are supported in the sense that they are deemed reasonable in the circumstances, and so are not ‘counted’ when assessing a student’s attendance record for the purposes of visa compliance or pastoral follow-up.

The absence is 'Noted but not supported'

This means that the absence is recorded, but not supported. The student is advised that the absence may pose a risk to the student in terms of progression, overall record of attendance, visa compliance, course implications, Fitness to Practice etc. Such absence may be taken into account if the student’s overall pattern of attendance is weak and could trigger follow-up activity with potentially serious consequences in some cases.

Whilst the student may nevertheless decide to be absent, he/she does so in the context of the advice provided.

Specific policies in relation to some programmes provide more detailed information about attendance, absence and the implications for that discipline.

h) Any absence which is not notified in advance will normally be recorded as unexplained (and therefore not supported) on the student’s attendance record. Retrospective notification (within 5 days) for absence with good cause may be supported and the student’s record amended accordingly. Where the attendance of a taught international Tier 4 study visa holder falls below 80%, this will trigger follow-up contact with the student to check whether any support or further advice is required. For Home / EU students, follow-up will be triggered if attendance falls below the agreed threshold for a particular programme of study.

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

j) A poor overall attendance record can have serious consequences relating to the student’s academic performance, progression, professional accreditation or Fitness to Practice. Some subjects have specific requirements for students who are absent without good cause. In the event of repeated 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) Progress Regulations (Section F 17 (c)).

For students on undergraduate or postgraduate taught programmes, it is the responsibility of the degree programme director (DPD) or appropriate nominee to review the student’s progress in all modules, and to determine whether he/she is making satisfactory progress. Failure to attend regularly the programme of study without good cause can constitute evidence of failure to make satisfactory progress.

[Note: progress / attendance requirements for Research students are different- they are available here: MPhil Progress Regulations (section K); and PhD Progress Regulations (Section L).

Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the progress of Research students rests with the supervisory team].

k) These Guidelines and associated arrangements will be reviewed regularly to take account of any issues raised or developments needed to ensure that they appropriately meet the needs of users (staff and students).

Lesley Braiden, Director of Student Services and Academic Registrar. May 2017.
Appendix 1: **Further Guidance relating to requests about absence from study**

There are many instances when individual students wish or need to be absent from their studies. These include, but are not limited to: illness, sport and other extra-curricular commitments, family commitments, bereavement, medical appointments, faith or religious observance. These guidelines are intended to support both students and academic colleagues in their approach to such instances. In general, they refer to absences from classes, not absences from assessments (which are subject to the PEC procedures).

a) Students who are not able to attend University for any reason are expected to inform their School/Institute and submit a **Absence Request form**, available via the Student Portal (S3P) (or the Request for Absence form in the case of students of medicine and dentistry). Failure to do so demonstrates poor academic commitment and, in some subjects, lack of professionalism.

b) Academic colleagues are expected to give due consideration to such notifications.

c) If students do not give notice of their absence and are absent without good cause, their absence is by definition recorded as 'unexplained' and therefore not supported, on their attendance record. A pattern of frequent unexplained absences will trigger follow-up by the School and ultimately (for Tier 4 international study visa holders, by the Student Progress Service, prior to reporting to the Home Office). Students are responsible for ensuring that they understand the attendance expectations for their programme of study and the consequences of poor attendance.

d) **This guidance assumes a reasonable approach by all concerned.** Where students do seek support (in the sense of ‘approval’) for their absence, the general principle underpinning this guidance is that this should not be withheld unreasonably. Absence requests should generally be considered in a sympathetic and supportive way, on an individual basis, bearing in mind that:

i. By ‘Noting and Supporting’ an 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 approved.

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

iii. This guidance applies to occasional absences lasting no longer than seven calendar days (i.e. including Saturday / Sunday). Except in the case of unavoidable absences owing to illness (for which medical evidence would be required), exceptions to this would require the express permission of the relevant degree programme director (DPD) or research supervisory team.

iv. Concerns about the student’s overall attendance record, and other considerations such as professional accreditation or Fitness to Practise, may make it difficult for academic staff to give unqualified positive support to every request. In such cases, the student’s absence will be **Noted but not supported** and the student will be advised about the potential consequences. If the student decides to be absent despite the advice, this is at the student’s own educational risk, in the knowledge of the possible implications (progression, overall record of attendance, course implications, Fitness to Practice etc).

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

vi. It is expected that, where possible, students will give reasonable notice (at least 24 hours) of their intended absence. In some subjects, the necessary advance notice period for pre-planned absence requests is specified. Of course, necessary absences cannot always be planned for in advance, and Schools/Institutes will generally understand and support this, although the exact approach may vary depending on the subject.

vii. In the case of International students with a Tier 4 study visa, the consequence of unexplained 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.
Appendix 2: **Absence from Study – what is considered ‘reasonable’?**

It is difficult to give definitive guidelines about what is considered ‘reasonable’, as much will depend on the circumstances, the student’s overall attendance record and the particular requirements for the subject. The general expectation is that requests for notified absences will normally be considered sympathetically, recognising, however, that it may on occasion be necessary to withhold formal support and advise the student accordingly if the absence carries a serious educational or professional risk for the student.

Decisions are always a matter of judgement, and the following may be helpful pointers in terms of the decision and the process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Reasonable’ absence requests typically fall into one of three broad categories. One of the key features common to all is that they are likely to be outside the direct control of the student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unexpected events</strong></td>
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<td>For example: Illness; medical / hospital appointments; bereavement; acute personal / emotional circumstances</td>
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<tr>
<td>These would generally be considered a reasonable ground for support. Medical evidence should always be supplied if the student is absent for 7 or more calendar days (i.e. including Saturday / Sunday)</td>
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<td>Absence for bereavement may depend on the familial or emotional closeness of the relationship, and this will always be a matter of judgement by member of staffing considering the request.</td>
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<td>Situations in this category will generally also be supported by medical or other evidence (which is particularly important if there is an associated PEC application)</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Life events</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>For example: family commitments; weddings and key family events; difficult family situations (eg a family relationship break-up)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occasional absences for family commitments or events would normally be supported, although the approach depends on the subject area and the particular attendance requirements, particularly for professional programmes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is not possible to specify what is ‘reasonable’- the decision will be subject to judgement depending on the circumstances. In some situations, it may be necessary to formalise the impact of such absence through the PEC process.</td>
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<th><strong>Extra-curricular activities and other personal commitments:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>For example:</td>
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<td>- sporting commitments; employability-related activities; volunteering; music or stage performances;</td>
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<td>- absence for reasons of religion / faith observance.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Extra-curricular activity:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The University encourages students to participate in extra-curricular activities, and occasional absences for this purpose should generally be considered reasonable. However, repeated ‘routine’ requests for absence at the same time each week would not be considered ‘reasonable’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In some professional subject areas, absence for extra-curricular activities would not be supported, and would be taken into account in the assessment of a student’s professionalism.</td>
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**Sporting commitments (1st Team athletes):**

Newcastle has a proud sporting tradition and profile and one of the University’s aims is to be a top University for sport (measured by having a Top 10 BUCS national ranking). The 1st team performance sport athletes make a key contribution to the attainment of this goal.

A significant issue for these students is attendance at away fixtures on Wednesday afternoons which mean that team athletes may have 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 the School. To assist with this:

- 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 support for absence for some away fixtures.
- 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.
- For each requested absence, the student should submit an online Absence Request form in the normal way, indicating clearly the reason for the request and the sport represented. This request should be submitted at least five working days prior to the date of the away fixture concerned.
- The designated person in the Academic Unit will consider the request and advise the student of the decision in the normal manner.
- Whilst 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); 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. For example, in Medicine, there is generally some flexibility in Stages 1 to 3, but course commitments would normally take priority, and support for absence may not always be possible.

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

**Religious / Faith observance**

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.

Individual requests should generally be considered in a supportive manner. Repeated ‘routine’ requests for absence at the same time each week would be subject to more scrutiny and may not be ‘reasonable’ – much will depend on the circumstances and options available. In some professional subject areas it may not be possible to support all such requests because of the impact on Fitness to Practice or professionalism assessments.

International students with a Tier 4 study visa should note 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.

It is helpful if students requesting support for specific absence on grounds of religion, belief or faith observance provide clear information about the reason for absence in their Student Notice.
of Absence Form (or the request for absence form in the case of students of Medicine or Dentistry).

The relevant University Chaplain (see contact details for the Chaplaincy) will be able to provide more information and interpretation about the specific requirements in individual cases.

Note: Absences from assessments and / or exams (or absences which impact on the student’s ability to submit an assessment on time and / or sit an exam) are not covered by this policy / guidance. In these circumstances, the student should submit a Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) application which will be considered by the relevant PEC committee. PEC applications will be considered on their merits - a ‘supported’ absence does not automatically lead to support for an associated PEC request. PEC applications for absences relating to sport participation must be endorsed by the Performance Sport Manager (Fraser Kennedy) in the Centre for Physical Recreation and Sport.

What is considered ‘not reasonable’?

It is difficult to provide a definitive list, but the following are unlikely to be considered ‘reasonable’ requests for absence. The approach may vary, depending on the subject and the attendance expectations and requirements. Typically they are things that the student could have anticipated or planned for:

- Holidays during term time or outside the rules for PGR holiday leave
- Parties / social events
- Impact of too much alcohol or other substances
- Transport problems
- Repeated ‘routine’ requests for absence at the same time each week (unless this is for necessary routine healthcare appointments)
- Noise disturbance in accommodation
- Lack of sleep

Students are expected to exercise good judgement and a reasonable approach.

Lesley Braiden
Director of Student Services and Academic Registrar
July 2017