

Student Attendance Policy

2020-21

Issued by the Standards and Enhancement Office

Approved by Senate March 2018

Technical updates of this document are undertaken on an annual basis to reflect changes to the University's organisational and management structures and to incorporate earlier, approved amendments to related policies, procedures and regulations

This document relates to the current year. If you become aware of any previous versions that are available on line please notify SEO@bolton.ac.uk so that action can be taken to remove the document(s).

STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The University acknowledges that student engagement is multi-faceted and seeks to promote the importance of face-to-face learning opportunities to encourage students, from an early stage in their degree, to develop strong working relationships with peers studying on their programme. Evidence shows that student engagement and attendance at scheduled sessions is fundamentally connected to a student's success in their programme of study¹. In ensuring that its students are presented with the best opportunities to succeed in their studies, the University expects full attendance at face-to-face and online classes. Non-attendance may lead to poor academic performance, warnings and, eventually, withdrawal from the programme of study. Attendance is also taken into account at Assessment Boards, particularly when determining module and progression outcomes, and when staff are asked to write job references for students. Nevertheless, the University does recognise that there are circumstances when a student may legitimately be unable to attend timetabled sessions, and here effective communication with the tutor/s concerned is fundamental.
- 1.2 Punctual attendance at a place of work is a fundamental expectation of employers and, in order to prepare students for employment, the University expects that students will treat attendance at scheduled classes as they would attendance at a place of work, that is to say that attendance is compulsory and efforts should be made to be punctual. This policy outlines the options available to University staff when a student is late to a class.
- 1.3 This document sets out the University's expectations in relation to the recording and monitoring of student attendance and absence, and the actions to be followed when attendance drops below a set threshold. The document also outlines how students may obtain authorisation for an absence or period of absence.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1 This policy document sets out a framework for dealing with low attendance and lateness. It is intended to be applied flexibly by Schools and partner institutions. The policy applies to all students studying on a University taught programme of study. Attendance by research degree students is covered in the Research Degree Regulations. This policy sets out minimum expectations for attendance; there may be programmes with additional, stricter, attendance requirements, such as those accredited by a professional body. In addition, changes to legislation may require that additional requirements are placed on certain groups of students, such as students sponsored by the University under Tier 4 of the Points Based System (or any successor process). Where such additional requirements apply, the University will expect students to comply with these additional requirements. Programme specific requirements are available in the relevant Programme Handbook. Access students are referred to Annex B for information specifically related to attendance on Access Programmes

¹ Liz Thomas et al., *What Works? Student Retention and Success*, (London, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2017) and Liz Thomas and Robert Jones, *Student Engagement in the Context of Commuter Students*, (London, The Student Engagement Partnership, 2017)

- 2.2 Students studying at partner institutions may be subject to a local attendance policy, set by the partner. That policy should meet the minimum expectations outlined in this framework, but may exceed them. If the attendance policy of the partner organisation is different to the University's policy, it will be communicated to students by the partner organisation.

3. ATTENDANCE ON TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

3.1 Expectation

- 3.1.1 The University's expectation is that punctual attendance at all scheduled sessions is compulsory. This normally includes lectures, seminars, workshops, placements, tutorials and scheduled online interactions and/or activities that are set out at programme level in the relevant Programme Handbook for the programme of study.

3.2 Punctuality, partial attendance and exclusion from teaching sessions

- 3.2.1 Students should arrive on time for classes and remain for the duration of the teaching session. Late arrival at, and early departure from, teaching sessions can be perceived as disruptive, discourteous, unprofessional and unfair to other class members and tutors. The tutor has the discretion to reasonably refuse admission to students who arrive late and to refuse early exit from class. Where admission to a class is refused, the student will be recorded as having been absent from the session. This will normally be recorded as an unauthorised absence unless the student is able to meet the criteria for an unplanned notified absence as detailed below.
- 3.2.2 As with planned notified absences, students who know in advance that they may be late or need to leave early should notify their Module Leader and/or Programme Leader as soon as practicably possible. The same procedure for notification should be followed and a student who has been given permission for late arrival/early departure should not normally be refused admission to the teaching session. In such situations, the needs of the individual and the overall group must be balanced and taken into consideration.

3.3 Notification of Absence

- 3.3.1 The University recognises that sometimes students may, for good reasons, be unable to attend a scheduled session or sessions. Students may request a 'notified absence' from one or more sessions, by contacting the relevant Module Leader and/or Programme Leader. **IMPORTANT: Tier 4 students that request a notified absence that exceeds one week must be referred to the International Student Journey Officer.** There are two categories of notified absence as outlined below.
- 3.3.2 Planned notified absences
A student may request a planned notified absence by contacting the Module Leader at least two working days in advance of the scheduled session(s). A planned notified absence will only be considered to have been granted where the Module Leader/Programme Leader has confirmed this in writing to the student. The student should normally explain why they are requesting the absence and may request that the Module Leader/Programme Leader keeps the reasons for their absence confidential. The Module Leader and/or Programme Leader may, if they deem it appropriate, ask students to provide documentary evidence for their planned absence. The Module Leader and/or Programme Leader may ask the student to

complete any formative work they have missed and forward any relevant learning materials to them.

3.3.3 Unplanned notified absences

Where a planned notified absence has not been granted and the student subsequently does not attend the session, this will normally be recorded as an unauthorised absence. However, it is not always possible to anticipate an absence, for example, as a result of illness or car breakdown. In cases where the absence could not reasonably have been foreseen, the student should inform the Module Leader and/or Programme Leader in writing no less than three working days after the event occurred. Students may be asked to provide documentary evidence of the issue(s) which caused their absence, if it is longer than five working days, such as a doctor's note. This should be considered by the Programme Leader and/or the relevant Academic Co-ordinator for Recruitment and Retention who may determine whether the evidence provided is suitable to mark the absence as an unplanned notified absence. If no such evidence can be provided then the absence will be recorded as unauthorised. Whether the absence is deemed to be notified or not, the Module Leader and/or Programme Leader may ask the student to complete any formative work they have missed and forward any relevant learning materials to them.

The standard of evidence required for an unplanned notified absence to be granted is higher than for a planned notified absence. There are two reasons for this; firstly, students should be encouraged to, wherever possible, gain approval for their absence in advance and, secondly, to avoid 'gaming' of the system where a range of issues can be reported after the fact but without evidence being provided.

3.3.4 Exceptions

A notified absence cannot be granted for an examination or other summative assessment. If a student misses a summative assessment they will need to apply for a further attempt, or an extension lasting more than the number of days set out in the assessment and/or course regulations, via the Mitigating Circumstances procedure which can be found on the Student Policy Zone section of the University website.

3.4 **Procedure to be undertaken in respect of attendance falling below the threshold**

3.4.1 Regardless of whether an absence is notified or unauthorised, the University regards attendance below 80% in a module as potentially endangering a student's progression and achievement as a substantial amount of material may have been missed. A poor attendance record can also lead to a repeat module/period of study decision being made at an Assessment Board. The procedure outlined below is intended to help students to make good on any material and work missed or to identify whether other options such as a pause in studies (suspension) should be explored. In addition, Students who are sponsored by the University under Tier 4 of the Points Based System **must** be referred to the International Student Journey Officer before suspending studies. Continued absence without good reason may result in withdrawal from the programme of study for non-attendance
IMPORTANT: Whilst 80% is the threshold adopted by the University, the University is required to report to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Tier 4 students who miss 10 consecutive expected contact points otherwise the student's attendance is considered unacceptable and they are withdrawn as a result of this.

3.4.2 Where a student's attendance falls below 80% in a module or, if the student is sponsored under Tier 4, they miss five consecutive contact points, the procedure outlined below will be followed. It should be noted that both notified and unauthorised absences will all count towards the 80% threshold:

- i. The student will be invited to a meeting with their Personal Tutor (or a nominee) and, if a Tier 4 student, the International Student Journey Officer to discuss their attendance and the reasons for their absence. Failure to attend the meeting may result in the issue of an *attendance warning*.
- ii. The Personal Tutor (or a nominee) will determine whether an attendance plan should be drawn up. In determining this, the Personal Tutor (or a nominee) will consider the stated reasons for absence and whether absences were unauthorised or notified, together with any evidence provided by the student to explain their absences. If appropriate, options for pausing studies (suspension) will be explored with the student until the issue causing the absence is resolved or otherwise managed. As an interruption to studies can impact on a student's financial situation, students will be directed to discuss their options with a Student Finance Advisor.
- iii. If an attendance plan is drawn up, the student will be required to comply with it. Further details on attendance plans and the potential penalties for failing to comply with them can be found in section 3.6.
- iv. In addition to the above, if the Personal Tutor (or a nominee) determines that the reasons for the periods of absence are not adequately explained an *attendance warning* may be issued by the Personal Tutor (or a nominee). See section 3.6 for more details on the types of warnings available.

3.4.3 Student attendance in a module will be measured, as a minimum expectation, at the mid-point and end-point of a semester/term, but Schools and partners may decide to measure attendance more frequently. In addition, Schools will need to determine a process to monitor consecutive missed contacts for Tier 4 students more regularly and informing the International Student Journey Officer of students who have missed 5 consecutive contacts. When an attendance plan has been drawn up, specific milestones may be set at which attendance will be measured to ensure that it meets the threshold.

3.4.4 If an attendance warning has already been issued to a student then the meeting outlined in 3.4.2 i. should be held with the student's Personal Tutor (or a nominee) and the Academic Co-ordinator for Recruitment and Retention (or a nominee), following which a final warning may be issued. As with the initial meeting, if the student concerned is a Tier 4 student, the International Student Journey Officer should also attend the meeting. If a final warning is issued, an attendance plan should always be set for the student.

3.4.5 In instances where there is no engagement with the process on the part of the student, reasonable efforts shall be made to contact the student to determine the reason for non-attendance. These attempts will be logged by the Personal Tutor on PULSE (if at the University) or through an alternate logging system (if the student is based at a partner institution). If the student fails to respond within the period set out in the communication to them, they may be subject to immediate suspension or withdrawal for non-attendance.

Care should be taken by Personal Tutors to understand a student's situation; the process is not intended to be punitive. Formal attendance warnings may not always be an appropriate first course of action; it may be that a student may have health issues that mean that a break in studies may be appropriate or that personal circumstances occurred which led to the absences. Reasonable efforts should be made to help the student to catch –up with missed work. It may be appropriate to direct students to other student support services. Conversations and actions taken should be recorded on the Personal Tutor logs with appropriate regard paid to confidentiality.

3.4.6 A formal report on a student's attendance may be made to the student's sponsor, including an employer, the Local Authority, the Student Loan Company

3.5 Early intervention

3.5.1 This policy is primarily designed to deal with what happens *after* attendance below the threshold has been identified. However, early identification of potential issues or patterns of absence and communication with students can help to address poor attendance before it has a detrimental impact on a student's studies. Therefore, early intervention by Personal Tutors is encouraged. Attendance should be discussed with students as part of induction.

3.5.2 Students' attendance will be recorded from the moment they enrol at the University and have scheduled classes. Where absences are identified by a Personal Tutor, students may be informed of this and have their attention drawn to the attendance policy. The reasons for their absence may be explored by the Personal Tutor and, if deemed appropriate, sources of support can be flagged to the student.

It is important that students understand that their attendance on a module will be taken into account at Assessment Boards, when determining whether refer or repeat module decisions will be made. In addition, attendance records are one of the key sources of information used when staff provide references to employers for students, so it is important that students understand this too.

3.6 Warnings and Attendance Plans

3.6.1 Warnings may be issued when poor attendance is detected. There are two levels of warning; *attendance warning*, followed by a *final attendance warning*. If attendance fails to meet expectations following the issue of an *attendance warning* then a *final attendance warning* may be issued. If attendance fails to improve following the issue of a *final attendance warning*, then a student may be withdrawn for non-attendance.

3.6.2 As outlined above, attendance plans may be drawn up when a student's attendance falls below 80%. The creation of an attendance plan should be offered to students with poor attendance. The attendance plan should be drawn up to help a student achieve a minimum of 80% attendance and catch up with missed content and formative work. This may include additional tutorials or a requirement for a student to repeat a module (for which there may be a charge). Milestones may be set which determine when the student's attendance may be measured again, as outlined in

3.4.3. Students will be asked to sign a statement which states that they will comply with the requirements set out in the attendance plan.

3.6.3 Failure to comply with the attendance plan may result in the issue of a *final attendance warning* or the withdrawal of the student for non-attendance if a *final attendance warning* has previously been issued. Students may refuse to sign the attendance plan. However, if their attendance drops below 80% again, they may be subject to the issue of a *final attendance warning*, or, if one has already been issued, withdrawal for non-attendance.

3.6.4 A central register of students with an attendance plan, or any attendance warning will be kept by the Student Experience Office. Personal Tutors should inform the Student Experience Office of any students who fall into this category.

3.7 Appealing the decision to withdraw for non-attendance

3.7.1 Students who have been withdrawn for non-attendance may appeal the decision using the Academic Appeals procedures detailed on the Student Information Policy Zone section of the University website. However, at the discretion of the relevant Head of School/Centre, the student may be offered re-admission to the University on the condition that they sign and comply with an attendance plan. If the student takes this option, their appeal will be withdrawn. If a student declines this option their appeal will be considered as per the normal academic appeals procedures.

3.7.2 A student who opts to agree to an attendance plan as outlined in 3.6 above and is then withdrawn for non-attendance (failure to comply with the attendance plan) may still choose to appeal the decision. However, a further attendance plan will not normally be offered to the student as an alternative to the appeal in these circumstances. Should the appeal be successful, an attendance plan may be set as part of the student's return to their studies.

4. Equality Impact Assessment

4.1 The University of Bolton is committed to the promotion of equality, diversity and a supporting environment for all members of our community. Our commitment to equality and diversity means that this policy has been screened in relation to the use of plain English, the promotion of the positive duty and the avoidance of discrimination in relation to all of the protected characteristics.

5 Other Related Policies

- 5.1 i) Student Attendance Monitoring Policy
- ii) Assessment Regulations for Undergraduate Programmes
- iii) Assessment Regulations for Postgraduate Programmes

6. Monitoring and Review

6.1 This Policy will be monitored by Heads of School/Centre.

6.2 This Policy will be reviewed by Education Committee every three years

7. Dissemination of and Access to the Policy

- 7.1 This Policy will be available on the University's website. It is expected that reference to the Student Attendance Policy will be included in Programme Handbooks and that the importance of regular attendance is included in student induction.

ANNEX A: RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Students are responsible for:

- a. Attending all learning and teaching sessions associated with their programme of study;
- b. Notifying their module tutors/research supervisor in advance if they expect to be absent from timetabled classes or meetings. This may be done in person, by 'phone or email;
- c. Obtaining prior permission from their Module Leader/Programme Leader/Research Supervisor for planned absences during term time, at least two working days prior to the planned absence;
- d. Notifying the Module Leader/Programme Leader of unplanned or unforeseen absences from classes and if requested by their personal tutor/research supervisor, providing a medical certificate or other evidence, to explain their absence.
- e. Notifying their tutors if their attendance has been incorrectly recorded.
- f. Obtaining learning material from missed classes.
- g. Undertaking formative assessments from missed classes.

2. Module tutors are responsible for:

- a. Reminding students of the importance of regular attendance at learning and teaching sessions;
- b. Recording student attendance on PULSE (if an on-campus programme) in accordance with the University Student Attendance Monitoring Policy;
- c. Keeping alert on tutee progress.
- d. Make available learning materials from missed classes.
- e. Make available formative assessment from missed classes.

3. Personal Tutors and/or Research Supervisors are responsible for:

- a. Checking tutee's record in PULSE once poor attendance issues have been identified.
- b. Carrying out recorded tutorials with tutees to discuss attendance issues;
- c. Referring international students to the International Student Journey Officer in Student Recruitment and Admissions Unit;
- d. Referring tutees to other sources of support that may be available to them e.g. Student Liaison Officers, Disability Service staff, counselling, financial advice;
- e. Drawing up an attendance plan for the student;
- f. Issuing attendance warnings;
- g. Keeping alert on the tutee's progress once the student is attending again;
- h. Referring the tutee to the Academic Co-ordinator for Recruitment and Retention if the tutee continues to fail to attend.

4. Programme Leaders or Research Co-ordinators are responsible for:

- a. Ensuring that all teaching staff maintain an accurate record of student attendance;
- b. Ensuring that students are informed in writing of the importance of regular attendance at learning and teaching sessions, and through Programme Handbooks of any approved programme or module specific attendance requirements.

5. Academic Co-ordinators for Recruitment and Retention or Research Co-ordinators are responsible for:

- a. Following up on attendance concerns identified by Personal Tutors or Research Supervisors;

- b. Together with Personal Tutors or Research Supervisors, meeting with students to discuss their attendance;
- c. Liaising with the International Student Journey Officers over international student attendance issues.
- d. Issuing attendance warnings;
- e. Advising Heads of Schools/Centres of students who need to be withdrawn.

6. Heads of School are responsible for:

- a. Ensuring that appropriate systems are in place at School/Centre level for students to notify the designated Academic Leader of planned absences and to report to the School/Centre unplanned absences.
 - b. Authorising the withdrawal of students who have failed to attend;
 - c. Ensuring appropriate forms are completed via the web-based Student Profile page.
 - d. Ensuring teaching staff are aware of the attendance policy and are implementing it appropriately.
7. In the case of postgraduate research students Directors of Studies, Main Supervisors, Research Co-ordinators and the Executive Dean, Research and Graduate School, should seek either approval of Board of Study for Research Degrees or confirm by Chair's action, prior to withdrawing a student.
8. International Student Journey Officers are responsible for notifying the UKVI of withdrawn students in accordance with Tier 4 Regulations current at the time of withdrawal

ANNEX B: ATTENDANCE ON ACCESS PROGRAMMES

Access programme modules are delivered in a more time-limited fashion than is the case on other University programmes. For this reason, the procedure outlined in the policy is applied differently. The amendments outlined below apply to Access programmes.

Access students are expected to attend 90% of scheduled sessions. Following any absence, students would be contacted and asked to attend an informal meeting with their Personal Tutor. At this meeting, students would be given any work they had missed to enable them to catch up.

In addition to the above, the following would apply:

1. If a student fails to attend for three classes on a module, then the module tutor will report this to the student's Personal Tutor. The Personal Tutor will arrange a meeting to discuss a student's attendance. If appropriate, an attendance warning may be issued and/or an attendance plan set.
2. If the student fails to attend a further three sessions following the meeting with their Personal Tutor this would be reported to the Programme Leader. A meeting between the student, Programme Leader and Personal Tutor would then be arranged to explore the reasons for non-attendance. If appropriate, an attendance warning may be issued and/or an attendance plan set.
3. If the student fails to attend a further three sessions, the Programme Leader will refer the matter to the Academic Co-ordinator for Recruitment and Retention who would look for a resolution of the matter or arrange for withdrawal of the student.

If a student fails to attend any of the above meetings then the issue would be referred to the next stage in the process.

ANNEX C: GUIDANCE ON MONITORING ATTENDANCE IN A BLENDED LEARNING CONTEXT

Monitoring attendance on programmes delivered by blended learning can present a particular challenge; students may attend for block delivery but are then expected to engage with activities such as group work and tutorials virtually. There may not be a single scheduled time for this engagement, but a specified window of time in which participation is expected. This can make student attendance/engagement difficult to monitor. In this context 'attendance' could be recorded at the end date and participation up to that point recorded. Care should be taken to explain to students that their engagement is monitored in this manner.

STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY	
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