Student Attendance and Engagement Policy

2020-21

Contents

Note:
The policy is intended to be applied flexibly in the recognition that the external environment in 2020/21 is subject to change and a variety of unforeseen circumstances may arise.

1.   PURPOSE

1.1   In ensuring that its students are presented with the best opportunities to succeed on their programmes of study, the University expects full attendance/engagement with scheduled sessions and activities. Evidence indicates that interaction with scheduled sessions and activities is fundamentally connected to student outcomes and allows students to work effectively alongside their tutors and peers.

1.2   The University recognises that there are circumstances when a student may legitimately be unable to attend and engage when required and here effective communication with the tutors concerned is fundamental to allow support measures to be put into place as appropriate.

1.3   This document sets out the University's expectations in relation to the recording and monitoring of student attendance, engagement and absence, and the actions to be followed when attendance and/or engagement drops below a set threshold.

1.4   The policy also outlines measures which may be taken in the event of student lateness, with the recognition that punctual attendance at scheduled sessions prevents unnecessary disruption to learning and is a matter of courtesy to the tutor and peers.

1.5   The Deputy Vice Chancellor, in consultation with the Assistant Vice Chancellor (Office for Students) and Academic Registrar, would be authorised to make reasonable adjustments to the policy and/or its implementation in the event that additional changes to requirements were announced or enacted at short notice by the Home Office.

2.   SCOPE

2.1   This document applies to all students studying on a University taught programme of study, including those who are sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route. Supplementary requirements and procedures for this group of international students are highlighted within.

The document also set outs separate attendance and engagement requirements and procedures for international postgraduate research students who are sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route in Annex B.

2.2   It is recognised that there may be programmes with additional attendance requirements, such as those accredited by a professional body and apprenticeships. Where such additional requirements apply, the University will expect students to comply with these requirements.

2.3   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. If the policy is different to the University's policy, it will be communicated to students by the partner institution.

3.   ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT ON TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

3.1   Recording of interactions

3.1.1   The University expects full attendance and/or engagement with **scheduled sessions** and activities. These may include face-to-face or online lectures, seminars, workshops, work-related learning, project supervision, tutorials and other set interactions which are set out in Module Guides and on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

3.1.2   Students are required to indicate their on campus or remote attendance of scheduled sessions by "checking in" on the *MyBolton App* at the start of the session, using a one-time code provided by the Module Tutor. Attendance is then verified by the Module Tutor. If a student is unable to "check in" at the start of the session but is attending the session, they should alert the Module Tutor of this.

3.1.3   If, for good reasons, students are unable to attend a scheduled session either on campus or remotely, they are expected to notify the Module Tutor and engage with the session by watching any online recordings and completing the tasks set on the VLE, or otherwise communicated. Satisfactory engagement within a week of the scheduled session will be assessed by a tutor and logged on the register within two weeks of the session.

3.1.4   If, for a legitimate reason, a student is unable to attend on campus scheduled sessions for an extended period and/or is unable to attend an on campus assessment, an Exceptional Request to Study Remotely form should be completed and submitted to their Programme Leader for approval. In some instances it may not be possible for approval to be granted e.g. where there are practical and/or professional body requirements. In such circumstances a flexible extension should be requested or if appropriate, an application for Mitigating Circumstances made.

Programme Leaders should inform the International Student Journey Officer where an Exceptional Request to Study Remotely is approved for an international student sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route.

3.2   Notification of absence for non-attendance or non-engagement

3.2.1   Students who for valid reasons are unable to attend or engage satisfactorily with a session or sessions within a week may request a "notified absence" be recorded on the register.

Please note that normal work demands on the part of an employer and holidays will not be viewed as valid reasons for absence.

3.2.2   Students may request a "notified absence" from their studies by contacting the Programme Leader* by email, copying in their Personal Academic Tutor. The student

should explain why they are requesting the absence and are unable to engage on the VLE within a week. The Programme Leader and Personal Academic Tutor may, if they deem it appropriate, ask students to provide documentary evidence** of the reason their notified absence.

Where a student is unable to engage in module activities and complete assessments <u>before the end of a module</u>, a request for Mitigating Circumstances should be submitted together with documentary evidence.

It may also be deemed appropriate for a student to pause (suspend) their studies until such time that they can re-engage.

* In large cohorts of students this may be the Cohort Leader.
** Examples of documentary evidence for notified absence include scans of official letters, e.g. from a medical professional, a legal professional, your employer; medical or death certificates and official reports.

3.3 Absence Procedure

3.3.1 Regardless of whether absence is notified or unauthorised, the University regards absence (non-attendance or non-engagement) from study a concern for a student's progression and achievement, as a substantial amount of delivery may have been missed.

3.3.2 **Early Intervention:** Communication between Personal Academic Tutors and students is essential where problems with attendance come to light. Where registers show any short periods of absence or emerging patterns, the Personal Academic Tutor should contact the student and set up a *well-being meeting* (face-to-face, or by video/voice call) to discuss the reasons for these. Early referral to other support services, where appropriate, is paramount. The importance of attendance and engagement should be clarified by the Personal Academic Tutor and strategies to improve these discussed with the student.

3.3.3 **First Absence Concern Meeting:** Where there a student's attendance/engagement (notified or unauthorised) falls below the 80%* threshold in any given month, they will be invited for an absence concern meeting with their Personal Academic Tutor. This may be conducted face-to-face or via a video call as appropriate.

*85% threshold for International students on programmes with Level 3, HE4 or HE5 awards who are sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route.

At the meeting the Personal Academic 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. Where it is identified that students require additional support, they may be referred to an Enhanced Personal Academic Tutor or other University Services, and/or be given a Supported Study Plan. If appropriate, options for pausing studies (suspension) will be explored with the student.

If the lack of attendance/engagement is not explained adequately, an *absence warning* may be issued and an *Attendance and Engagement Plan* drawn up with timescales included. Students will be asked to agree to a statement which states that they will comply with the requirements set out in the plan.

An *absence warning* may also be issued if the student does not attend the meeting without a valid explanation.

3.3.4 **Second Absence Concern Meeting:** If following the first absence concern meeting, attendance/engagement has not improved within a month, a student will be invited for a second absence concern meeting with their Personal Academic Tutor (or a nominee) and the Academic Co-ordinator for Recruitment and Retention (or a nominee). This may be conducted via video calling or face-to-face as appropriate. A *final absence warning* may also be issued if the student does not attend the meeting without a valid explanation.

At the meeting the stated reasons for continued absence/lack of engagement and evidence provided by the student to explain their absences will be considered. Where there are valid reasons for continued absence, options for further referral and/or pausing studies (suspension) will be explored.

If the lack of attendance/ engagement is not explained adequately, a final *absence warning* may be issued (following an initial attendance warning). A further *Attendance and Engagement Plan* will be drawn up with timescales which students will be asked to sign to confirm they will comply with the requirements set out.

3.3.5 **Withdrawal**: If a student does not attend/engage following a final *absence* warning, they may be withdrawn from their programme of study.

3.4 **Additional Procedures for International Students Sponsored under Tier 4/Student Visa Route.**

International students sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route who request a notified absence which exceeds one week <u>must</u> be referred to the International Student Journey Officer by the Programme Leader.

Where an international student is sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route., the International Student Journey Officer should be notified of the first absence concern meeting and invited to any subsequent ones.

In addition to withdrawal of sponsorship due to unsuccessful outcomes of Absence Concern Meetings (see 3.3.5), the University is required to withdraw sponsorship of any international student on a programme at HE6 or above who does not engage for a period of 60 consecutive days if attending via blended (on campus and remote). This period is reduced to 30 days if the student is attending/engaging 100% remotely.

International students on taught programmes with Level 3, HE4 or HE5 awards who are sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route will be withdrawn if their attendance falls below 70% for three consecutive months, unless there are exceptional and evidenced reasons for the non-attendance (e.g. illness).

Any international student who is sponsored by the University under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route seeking to suspend studies must first be referred to the International Student Journey Officer before doing so.

3.5 Recording Meetings and Communications

It is essential that contact and interventions to support students, as well as absence concern meetings and their outcomes, are logged as Personal Tutor Interactions on the Pulse record system by the Personal Academic Tutor in a timely manner.

4. ATTENDANCE/ENGAGEMENT AND ASSESSMENT BOARD DECISIONS

Where a student has not satisfactorily attended or engaged with a module or number of modules and has been unsuccessful, an Assessment Board may decide it is appropriate for them to repeat a period of study (if applicable) or be withdrawn (made fail and finish), as outlined in the Assessment Regulations.

5. APPEALS AGAINST WITHDRAWAL FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

5.1 Students who have been withdrawn for non-attendance/non-engagement may appeal the decision using the Academic Appeals procedures detailed on the Student Policy Zone. At the discretion of the relevant Head of School, the student may if appropriate be offered re-admission to the University on the condition that they sign and comply with an *Attendance and Engagement 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.

5.2 A student who opts to agree to an *Attendance and Engagement Plan* and is then withdrawn for non-attendance/non-engagement (failure to comply with the plan) may still choose to appeal the decision. However, a further *Attendance and Engagement 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 and Engagement Plan* may be set as part of the student's return to their studies.

6 PUNCTUALITY

6.1 The University expects punctual attendance at all scheduled sessions. These may include face-to-face or online lectures, seminars, workshops, placements, tutorials and other set interactions which are set out at module level in Module Guides and on the VLE.

6.2 Students should plan to arrive in good time for all on campus sessions and remain for the duration of these. Late arrival at, as well as early departure from, on campus

sessions can be perceived as discourteous, unprofessional and disruptive to other class members and tutors. The tutor has the discretion to reasonably refuse admission to students who arrive late.

6.3   Students who know in advance that they may be late to an on campus session or who need to leave early should notify their Module Leader as soon as practicably possible.

6.4   It should be noted that students who "check in" later than 10 minutes after the start of the class and/or who are recorded by their Module Tutor as attending later than 10 minutes after the start of the class, will have a late mark automatically shown on the register.

ANNEX A: RESPONSIBILITIES

1. <u>Students are responsible for:</u>
   a. Punctual attendance of scheduled learning and teaching sessions associated with their programme of study in and/or engaging with the online activities set within a week of the session;
   b. Checking in to scheduled sessions via MyBolton App when attending these or notifying the Module Tutor if they are unable to do so;
   c. Notifying their Module Tutors in advance that they are unable to attend scheduled classes or meetings and will be engaging on the VLE;
   d. Obtaining approval from their Programme Leader and Personal Academic Tutor for notified periods of absence or the need for 100% remote learning (providing evidence where necessary);
   e. Notifying their Module Tutors if their attendance has been incorrectly recorded.

2. <u>Module Tutors are responsible for:</u>
   a. Reminding students of the importance of regular attendance and engagement.
   b. Verifying student attendance of scheduled sessions;
   c. Recording student engagement on registers within two weeks of the session;
   d. Recording student absences on the registers within two weeks of the session;
   e. Keeping alert on student progress;
   f. Flagging up a period of absence or pattern of absence to the Programme Leader and Personal Academic Tutor.

3. <u>Personal Academic Tutors are responsible for:</u>
   a. Introducing themselves to the tutees and clarifying their role in relation to support, retention, and management of attendance/engagement;
   b. Checking their tutees' attendance records if absence issues have been identified;
   c. Carrying out recorded tutorials with tutees to discuss absence issues;
   d. Setting up and carrying out Wellbeing and Absence Concern Meetings;
   e. Referring international students sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route to the International Student Journey Officer in Student Services;
   f. Referring tutees to other sources of support that may be available to them e.g. Student Liaison Officers, Disability Service staff, counselling, financial advice;
   g. Drawing up an *Attendance and Engagement Plans* for tutees;
   h. Issuing *Attendance and Engagement Warnings;*
   i. Keeping alert on the tutee's progress once the student is attending again;
   j. Referring the tutee to the Academic Co-ordinator for Recruitment and Retention if the tutee continues to fail to attend.

4. <u>Programme Leaders* are responsible for:</u>
   a. Ensuring that all teaching staff are maintaining accurate records of student attendance;
   b. Ensuring that students are informed of the importance of regular attendance of, and engagement, in scheduled sessions - through programme induction (new and continuing students), and by referring to this policy and information in Programme Handbooks, Module Guides and other programme documentation.

c.   Authorising notified absences and *Exceptional Requests to Study Remotely*.

* Where programmes have large cohorts, this may be the role of the Cohort Leader.

5.   <u>Academic Co-ordinators for Recruitment and Retention are responsible for:</u>
   a.   Following up on attendance concerns identified by Personal Academic Tutors;
   b.   Together with Personal Academic Tutors attending the Second Absence Concern Meeting with students to discuss their attendance;
   c.   Liaising with the International Student Journey Officer over international student attendance issues;
   d.   Issuing *Attendance and Engagement Plans and Warnings*;
   e.   Advising Heads of Schools of students who need to be withdrawn.

6.   <u>Heads of School are responsible for:</u>
   a.   Authorising the withdrawal of students who have failed to attend;
   b.   Ensuring teaching staff are aware of the Attendance and Engagement Policy and are promoting it to students and implementing it appropriately;

7.   <u>The Students' Union General Manager</u>
   a.   Monitoring the attendance of any sabbatical officer of the Students' Union who is sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route and notifying the International Student Journey Officer of any absence concerns

8.   <u>The International Student Journey Officer is responsible for:</u>
   a.   Noting and attending absence concern meetings
   b.   Notifying the UKVI of withdrawn students in accordance with Home Office regulations at the time of withdrawal.

ANNEX B: ENGAGEMENT POLICY FOR INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

1. Scope: This section sets out the specific engagement requirements for international postgraduate research students in the UK who are sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route.

2. Attendance and Engagement Expectations: It is expected that all Postgraduate Research students meet with their Director of Studies on a monthly basis up to the completion of their research. This monthly meeting may be face to face at the University in Bolton or via video calling.

International students sponsored under Tier 4 or the Student Visa Route are required to complete a Research Attendance form either during or directly following the meeting with their supervisor. This form must be signed by both the student and the Director of Studies (copies should be retained by both student and Director of Studies).

3. Remote Study Outside the UK: Students wishing to undertake their research studies for a period of time outside the UK must receive approval from both the International Student Journey Officer and their Director of Studies. Engagement and attendance expectations as set out above will apply.

4. Notified absence: If an international student is unable to attend and/or engage for a period of time, for example due to illness, he/she should seek approval for a notified absence from both their Director of Studies and the International Student Journey Officer. Please note that normally any approved absence must not exceed 60 days in duration and the student must still be able to complete their studies within the time granted on their visa. Documents must be provided to the International Student Journey Officer to be retained as evidence.

5. Holidays: International students wishing to take holiday must complete a Postgraduate Research Holiday request form. Holiday requests must be approved by the students Director of Studies and forwarded to the International Student Journey Officer normally 2 weeks prior to the holiday period.

6. **Non-compliance:** Students who fail to submit a Research Student Attendance form during any month will be deemed to be absent from their research studies. They will be contacted by email and asked to explain the reason for non-submission. If a student fails to submit a Research Student Attendance form for two consecutive months, they will be invited to a meeting with the Director of Studies and the International student Journey Officer to discuss attendance concerns.

If a student does not provide a satisfactory explanation for missing two monthly supervision meetings, does not attend the meeting requested or fails to submit a Research Student Attendance form for three consecutive months, they will be referred to the Executive Dean – Research and Graduate School and the Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions for consideration for withdrawal.

STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY	
Policy ref:	
Version number	3
Version date	October 2020
Name of Reviewer(s)	Lisa Cove and Anna Fitzpatrick
Policy Owner (Group/Centre/Unit)	Student Experience Unit and Standards and Enhancement Office
Person responsible for implementation (postholder)	Director of Student Life and Satisfaction
Approving committee/board	Senate
Date approved	17th July 2017
Effective from	September 2017
Dissemination method e.g. website	Website
Review frequency	Three-yearly
Reviewing committee	Education Committee
Consultation history (individuals/group consulted and dates)	Heads of Schools, Academic Co-ordinators, Standards and Enhancement Office, Student Data Management, Academic Support Services, Students' Union, International Student Journey Officer, Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions.
Document history (e.g. rationale for and dates of previous amendments)	First published July 2017.