

Student Engagement and Participation Policy – Promoting Engagement and Participation for all Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes



1. Aims

The purpose of the Student Engagement and Participation Policy (the Policy) is to reinforce the University's commitment to providing an excellent student experience by facilitating a supportive and collaborative learning environment, with all students actively engaged in their learning.

The Policy mirrors the requirements that are expected within an employment environment and in this way, supports the commitment of the University to developing the skills and behaviours needed by successful graduates.

The Policy recognises that the University's timetabled teaching sessions are a fundamental element of the on campus student experience and provide a forum for debate and the exchange of ideas for which student engagement and participation is essential.

Also, the Policy is part of a wider University commitment to promoting and enhancing student engagement, consultation and participation across the University.

Finally, the Student Engagement and Participation Policy enables the University to support international students in meeting the attendance requirements of their Tier 4 Visas.

2. Engagement and Participation

Engagement and Participation includes, *inter alia*, attendance at the University's timetabled teaching sessions, contributing to group work sessions, the submission of course work, completing examinations, meeting with Personal Tutors and using the University's learning resources, including the University Library, online resources and Blackboard. The responsibilities of students, set out in the Student Charter, support the Student Engagement and Participation Policy. The Student Charter states that students should;

- Complete all scheduled learning, research and assessment activities
- Contribute to, and support others to contribute to, the academic exchange of ideas and interactions

3. Student Attendance

The University expects all students to attend all of their timetabled teaching sessions, unless their absence is authorised by the School or the Tier 4 Compliance team. For absences due to ill health lasting longer than a week (a week is defined as 5 consecutive working days), students will be expected to provide supporting medical evidence, usually in the form of a sick or fit note issued by the General Practitioner or Hospital. More detail is available in the Authorised Absence Policy.

Student attendance is essential:

- In promoting greater understanding of the subject
- In engaging with other students on the course
- In providing an opportunity for both student and tutor to assess and monitor progress
- In developing time-management and team-working skills
- To keep up-to-date with any developments relating to the programme of study
- In developing skills essential for employment and/or self-employment

The Student Engagement and Participation Policy recognises that some programmes, including but not limited to those leading to a professional qualification, have course specific attendance requirements, over and above the requirements set in this Policy. These requirements will be clearly communicated to students from the start of the course via Programme Handbooks and during introductory meetings.

The Policy also recognises that for Tier 4 Visa purposes, international students are required to maintain high levels of attendance and engagement, to meet the requirements of the Home Office.

4. Staff and Student Responsibilities

The Policy aims to place a corresponding set of shared obligations on both staff and student.

STAFF/UNIVERSITY RESPONSIBILITIES	STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES
Ensure that students are made aware of the attendance requirements of their course.	Familiarise themselves with the particular attendance requirements of their course.
Give students reasonable notice of any timetabling changes.	Give reasonable notice of any planned or unavoidable absences and seek approval.
Ensure that information on any changes to timetabling is communicated effectively to students through Blackboard or any other appropriate means.	Check their course and subject notice boards, Blackboard and University email communications regularly for information on timetabling changes.
Arrive promptly for scheduled sessions, as well as ensuring that sessions end promptly.	Practice effective time management so as to ensure consistent attendance.
Facilitate such changes to a student's timetable as are appropriate and reasonable, having given due consideration to the student's circumstances and obligations	Give appropriate consideration to the logistical difficulties in making timetabling changes to seek such alterations under reasonable circumstances.
Arrange regular meetings or meeting opportunities between Personal Tutors and students.	Attend and arrive promptly for scheduled meetings with Personal Tutors.
Encourage student attendance by regularly reviewing and improving upon the design of the course and the method of delivery.	Participate in feedback and consultation opportunities.
Monitor student attendance and respond to student absences in a supportive and timely fashion to facilitate student re engagement and success.	Sign attendance registers in all timetabled teaching sessions and respond to any follow up from staff relating to absences in a positive way.

5. Monitoring

The Student Engagement and Participation Policy recognises the importance of monitoring levels of student engagement and participation. Monitoring is carried out via the Student Attendance Monitoring System (SAMS) which records attendance for all on-campus, timetabled teaching sessions.

The SAMS enables the University to maintain a comprehensive record of student attendance on all taught programmes. To enable students and the University to derive benefit from the SAMS, where the attendance of students falls below the required level for their academic programme or where students have missed consecutive teaching days, interventions will be triggered. These interventions are not intended to be punitive and are focussed on ensuring the wellbeing of students, responding in an appropriate and supportive way when students are having personal or academic difficulties and raising the overall level of student attendance, engagement and success.

6. Intervention Process (Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught study*)

The SAMS will trigger an alert to the Student and their Personal Tutor through two different sets of attendance analyses. The first being the student's attendance percentage over a short period analysis of two weeks and whether this has fallen below the required threshold of attendance and the second being the number of days the student has been absent from timetabled teaching.

Short Period Attendance Percentage Analysis (monitored over a 14 academic timetabled days rolling basis)

Stage 1

Where student attendance falls below the required level, initial intervention is via an automated, supportive e-mail from the University reminding the student about the importance of attending timetabled sessions and highlighting support services for students who may have difficulties.

Stage 2

Secondary intervention is through an automated supportive and personalised text message from the University reminding the student about the importance of attending timetabled teaching and highlighting support services for students who may have difficulties.

*** The intervention process will be triggered by different attendance percentage levels depending on level, mode and course of study.**

Consecutive Absence Analysis

Stage 1

An email alert to the student's Personal Tutor will be triggered if the student has missed five consecutive teaching days.

The personal tutor will review the student's attendance and engagement to make a decision on whether to do one of the following:

- No action (if the student's engagement and overall attendance is satisfactory)
- Arrange a personal tutor meeting to discuss absence and/or academic concerns
- Escalate to the final intervention

The calculation will be reset and start counting from 0 days if a student attends a timetabled session. If the student is absent from a further 5 consecutive teaching days, this will trigger an email alert to the Personal Tutor again (Stage 1).

Stage 2 (excluding Tier 4 students, please refer to the Tier 4 Attendance Policy)

Where a student has missed ten consecutive days on which they have taught sessions, and has either failed to notify the School of the reason for their absence or if their absence was not authorised, the SAMS will trigger a further automated supportive text message.

If there is no response from the student, a subsequent follow up should be carried out by the School and alternative attempts should be made to contact the student. This intervention is designed to ensure that students who may be at risk are identified and urgent action taken to support the student.

Final Intervention - Formal Hearing

Where all previous attempts to improve attendance have failed, or the student has failed to engage with the process, the Personal Tutor can make the decision to escalate the issue to the final stage of the intervention process. The student will be invited to attend a formal hearing, chaired by the Head of School or nominee. The panel should normally comprise of the Head of School or nominee, a representative from the Student Union, the personal tutor or another member of academic staff who knows the student and a member of the Tier 4 Compliance team if the student holds a Tier 4 visa. Students should be given at least five working days' notice of the hearing and can be accompanied by a fellow student for support.

Hearings can proceed in the absence of a student who refuses or fails to attend. Formal hearings are the final point in the process and whilst they continue to offer the student an opportunity to explain why they have not been able to attend or seek support, they will usually be focussed on making a decision as to whether a student should be withdrawn from the University due to failure to attend.

Notes of the meeting should be taken and the student should receive a letter confirming the outcome of the hearing within two working days, in line with Part O of the University General Regulations.

Appeal

Students may lodge an appeal against a decision taken to terminate their enrolment in line with Part O of the University General Regulations.

Timing

Where it may take a few days to arrange a meeting between the Personal Tutor and student, during which time the attendance of the student may not improve, the level of intervention should not be adjusted by the School or Tier 4 Compliance team.

School Discretion

It should be noted that where a Personal Tutor does not wish, on the basis of their knowledge of the performance and welfare of a student, to progress with a meeting with the student, even where a student may not have significantly improved their attendance, as long as these reasons are properly documented within the SAMS as an audit record, there is no formal requirement for actions to be escalated.

It should be noted that where a School wishes to progress more quickly in terms of the interventions, based on their knowledge of the student and previous responses to supportive interventions, Schools can take the decision to move directly to a personal tutor meeting or the formal hearing where the intervention is more formal.

7. Students with Disabilities and long term health conditions

Students with disabilities and long term health conditions are, as far as possible, expected to attend all of their timetabled teaching sessions. Where a student with a disability or long term health condition finds they are unable to attend teaching sessions due to short term ill health, they should notify the School by completing the Authorised Absence Request Form so that the Authorised Absence Policy can be applied to the absence request and processed as appropriate.

Where a student with a disability or long term health condition is finding that their ability to fully attend timetabled teaching sessions is regularly impaired due to their disability or long term health condition, the student should be encouraged to seek support from the University's Student Wellbeing Centre and their Personal Tutor to enable appropriate review and action planning to take place.

The existence of a learning support plan which notes that "absences should be viewed sympathetically", or a diagnosis of a long term condition or disability, should not be viewed by students or staff as meaning that students have permanently authorised absence in place.

8. International Students with Tier 4 Visas

The Policy should be read in conjunction with the Tier 4 Student Attendance Policy (Appendix 1) which sets out the specific requirements for attendance relevant to students who hold a Tier 4 Visa and the responsibilities of the University as Tier 4 Visa Sponsor.

Student Engagement and Participation Policy (Appendix 1)

Tier 4 Attendance Policy

1. Purpose

As the sponsor of the Tier 4 visa, the University is required by the Home Office to record Tier 4 Students' attendance and engagement in their study. The Tier 4 Attendance Policy is an essential component to the University's objective of complying with the Home Office's requirements, as stated in the Tier 4 Point Based System Sponsor Guidance. It ensures the retention of the Tier 4 Sponsor Licence which allows the University to continue to sponsor students to study in the UK. The Tier 4 Attendance Policy forms part of the Student Engagement and Participation Policy that applies to all students and should also be read in conjunction with the Authorised Absence Policy.

The Home Office requires the University to ensure that the Student Engagement and Participation and Tier 4 Attendance Policy is consistently implemented where appropriate; failure to comply could result in the University having its Tier 4 Sponsor Licence suspended or revoked. This could place the immigration status of all Tier 4 visa students at the University of Lincoln at risk.

The Tier 4 Attendance Policy aims to improve the overall student experience and provide an additional layer of support to students who hold a Tier 4 visa, and to ensure that they comply with the attendance conditions of their study visa.

2. Scope

The Tier 4 Attendance Policy applies to all international students studying a taught programme who hold a current Tier 4 visa to study at the University of Lincoln. For research based students and those in a supervisory role, there is a separate Student Engagement and Participation Policy for Postgraduate Research Programmes.

The University will monitor attendance in line with current Home Office guidance to identify Tier 4 students who are failing to attend or adequately engage with their studies and take appropriate action.

The Policy can also be applied to students who hold a Tier 4 visa, who are sponsored by the University of Lincoln and are studying at a partner institution. However, the attendance monitoring process and attendance interventions may differ.

The Policy will be implemented by the Tier 4 Compliance team with support and input from the student's Personal Tutor and Head of School or nominee.

3. Monitoring

Monitoring is carried out via the Student Attendance Monitoring System (SAMS) which records attendance for all on campus students at timetabled teaching sessions. Students are required to sign their name in the appropriate box on the pre-printed attendance register that is presented at all timetabled sessions. The signature should be the student's legal name.

Students should not attend alternative sessions to those shown on their timetable as their name will not be printed on the attendance register for these sessions and they will not be recorded as in attendance. Students must also stay for the whole duration of the timetabled sessions. If the student is found to have left the session before it has finished, they will be marked as absent by the academic.

It is considered misconduct if a student has been found to have signed on behalf of another student, or if the student had asked a peer to sign the register on their behalf. The students involved may face disciplinary action as set out under Part C of the University General Regulations.

Postgraduate Taught – Thesis module

For most postgraduate taught programmes, there are no timetabled sessions during the thesis module. During this period, students are expected to devote as much time to their thesis as would be spent in full-time employment.

The School will be responsible for the monitoring of Tier 4 visa students during this period and this is usually in the form of regular supervisory meetings. A record of the meeting must be completed for the purpose of ensuring both the student and the supervisor are clear on the progress that has been made, as well as providing an auditable record for the Home Office to demonstrate engagement during the non-timetabled period. Ideally these meetings should take place face-to-face unless the student is out of the country for research or has approved authorised absence.

Annual Leave for Postgraduate Taught Programmes

Tier 4 visa students studying a full-time postgraduate programme do not have a summer vacation period.

Annual leave can be granted for a short period at the discretion of the student's respective School and Thesis Supervisor. The maximum length of time a student should be granted annual leave is two weeks. More than two weeks of annual leave could have a negative impact on the student's progress and affect their ability to complete their studies by the course end date. Annual leave should only be granted to a student if this does not impact the student's ability to complete by their visa expiry date.

4. Intervention Process

All students will follow the same intervention process noted in the Student Engagement and Participation Policy. Where student attendance does not improve following Stage 1 or 2 interventions noted in the Student Engagement and Participation Policy, Tier 4 visa students will be invited to meet with a member of the Tier 4 Compliance team to discuss any problems they may have and the potential compliance breach of their study visa.

The Tier 4 Compliance team will ensure that the students leave these meetings with an agreed action plan, focussed on the outcomes of the discussion that took place.

Where all attempts to improve attendance have failed, or the Tier 4 visa student has failed to engage with the Tier 4 Compliance team, it will be considered a breach of Tier 4 compliance responsibilities. The Tier 4 Compliance will recommend that the student is invited to a formal hearing, chaired by the Head of School or nominee. The meeting reflects the Formal Hearing in the Intervention Process noted in the Student Engagement and Participation Policy.

Consecutive Missed Attendance

Tier 4 students who miss five consecutive days on which they have timetabled teaching can quickly become non-compliant within the terms of their visa and an automated email will be sent out to notify them of the potential risk to their study visa.

Where a Tier 4 visa student has missed ten consecutive days on which they have taught sessions, the SAMS will alert the Tier 4 Compliance team so that an urgent response can be made. The Tier 4 Compliance team, in the absence of any other information being available regarding the student's absence, will arrange a Formal Hearing as noted in the Intervention Process.

Authorised Absence Policy

Although it is expected that students should attend all timetabled sessions, it is understood that sometimes, due to unavoidable circumstances, students are not able to attend. All students should refer to the [Authorised Absence Policy](#) for further guidance.

For Tier 4 visa students, requests for authorised absence are considered by a senior member of the Tier 4 Compliance team.

Any periods of authorised absence granted by the Tier 4 Compliance team are on the basis that the absence will not affect their ability to complete their course of study by the visa expiry date held by the student. As the Home Office state in the Tier 4 Guidance for Sponsors, the University (as the sponsor) can continue sponsoring the Tier 4 visa as long as “the student can still complete their course within their existing period of leave when they resume studies”.

If the student requires a leave of absence that will affect the student’s ability to complete the course by the visa expiry date, the Tier 4 Compliance team would not be able to approve the authorised absence request due to the Home Office requirements.

Students would have to consider a period of interruption from study instead of authorised absence. If a student interrupts their study, the University is required by the Home Office to report the Tier 4 visa for curtailment and to stop sponsorship of the student’s current visa.

The Home Office will contact the student directly regarding the curtailment of the Tier 4 visa. The student would be required to return home during the period of interruption, as they are not actively studying. When the student is ready to resume study, they will be able to request a new Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) from the University to apply for new leave to enter and study in the UK.

5. Withdrawal and Cancellation of Tier 4 visa

If a student fails to comply with the Student Engagement and Participation Policy and the Tier 4 Attendance Policy, the decision will be made by the University to withdraw their student status. Students who are withdrawn due to non-attendance have the right to appeal in line with Part O of the University General Regulations.

Students are given 10 working days to lodge an appeal from the date of the withdrawal letter. During the 10 working days, students are not permitted to attend any taught sessions or undertake any assessments until an appeal application is submitted. Once an appeal application is submitted against the decision of withdrawal, the student will be able to resume study whilst the decision is pending.

The student’s Tier 4 visa will not be reported to the Home Office for curtailment until either the appeal deadline has passed or, if the student has submitted an appeal, after the appeal decision has been made (if appropriate).

If the student decides not to appeal the withdrawal decision, the Tier 4 visa will be reported to the Home Office for curtailment within 10 working days after the appeal deadline.

If the appeal application results in a successful outcome, the student will be able to continue on their course of study and their Tier 4 visa will remain intact. If the appeal is unsuccessful, the Tier 4 visa will be reported within 10 working days of the decision.

Once the visa has been reported for curtailment, the Home Office will write to, or email, the student directly to inform them of the action they must take. The student needs to follow the instructions provided by the Home Office and make arrangements to either return home, make an alternative application for leave in the UK, or find a new Sponsor.