

Student Engagement and Participation Policy for postgraduate research programmes

1. Aims

The University of Lincoln aims to provide each student with the highest possible quality student experience. Encouraging and ensuring student engagement with all aspects of their learning experience is one of the key aspects of achieving this.

This policy has been developed as part of the University's overall aim to provide a supportive learning environment of which student attendance is one form of gauging overall engagement and is an important element in identifying students that require additional academic and personal support. This in turn aids student retention and performance.

In addition, the University is required by the Home Office, under the University's Tier 4 Sponsor Licence duties, to monitor Tier 4 visa students and comply with its sponsorship duties and reporting requirements.

2. Engagement and Participation

Students must take active participation in their learning experiences and take responsibility for achieving their potential through successful completion of each stage of their studies.

Regular attendance and academic success are closely linked. Students who attend regular supervisory meetings, engage with professional and research based training and development are more likely to have a rewarding experience and develop core skills and abilities.

Engagement and participation includes, but is not limited to, attendance at scheduled meetings with the Director of Studies and/or supervisor and the completion of all scheduled learning, research and assessment activities.

The Director of Studies has the responsibility to meet their student on a regular and frequent basis with a minimum expectation that a formal recorded supervisory meeting will take place with their students on a monthly basis (full-time) or every two months (part-time) including during the thesis pending period and during post-viva amendments. The only point where recorded supervisory meetings are not required is when a student has submitted their thesis and is awaiting their viva voce.

3. Student Attendance

Attendance of each student at the University is formally monitored and recorded at monthly (full-time) or bi-monthly (part-time) supervision meetings between the student and their Director of Studies. As stated in the University's Research Degrees Regulations (5.6) 'Where a student enrolls for a full-time programme, they shall be expected to devote as much time to the research as would be given to full-time enrolment'.

Meetings should normally be face-to-face, or, where agreed as appropriate by the Supervisor, via a virtual equivalent, such as a telephone, email or Skype meeting. Where students are known to be working away from Lincoln as part of their research study, including where there may be a time difference, these monthly meetings must be maintained and recorded. Students and Director of Studies share responsibility for maintaining contact. At the conclusion of each monthly meeting, the PGR Progress Meeting Report form should be completed, signed and dated by the student and Director of Studies and submitted to the School office in a timely manner.

For students with a University sponsored Tier 4 visa, the completed Progress Meeting reports forms part of the attendance monitoring process required by the Home Office. Where a Tier 4 visa student fails to engage with the University and fails to attend scheduled meetings without notification or are found to be in breach of the Tier 4 Compliance Regulations, the University will have to take action. This may include a report to the Home Office and the Tier 4 visa is reported for cancellation.

If a student requires a further CAS to apply for a visa extension to remain in the UK to complete their course, the University will take into account the student's attendance/engagement record when a decision is made about whether a CAS will be issued or not.

The University expects all students to attend all scheduled meetings unless their absence is authorised by the Director of Studies (e.g. annual leave), the Tier 4 Compliance team (Tier 4 visa students only) or are too unwell to attend. For absence due to ill health lasting longer than a week, students will be expected to provide supporting medical evidence. More details is available in the Authorised Absence Policy.

Intervention Process

The intervention process is designed to ensure that students who may be at risk are identified and action is taken to contact and support the student appropriately.

Stage 1

Where a student fails to attend a scheduled supervisory meeting without prior notice, initial intervention is via an email from the School informing them they have missed a scheduled meeting with their Director of Studies. A new meeting date and time is arranged to take place as soon as practicable to avoid the student missing a monthly or bi-monthly meeting.

Stage 2

Where a student does not engage following Stage One of the intervention process, they will be invited to a formal interview with their Director of Studies or nominee.

The interview is designed to ensure that students can discuss any problems of an academic or personal nature that they may have, in a safe, supportive, one to one, environment. The Director of Studies will want to ensure that students leave these meetings with an agreed action plan in place which is focussed on the outcomes of the discussion.

Stage 3

Where all previous attempts to improve attendance have failed or the student has failed to engage with the process, the student will be invited to attend a formal hearing, chaired by the Head of School or nominee.

Students should be given at least 5 working days' notice of the hearing and can be accompanied by a fellow student for support. The Panel should normally be comprised of the Head of School, or nominee, a representative from the SU, the Director of Studies or another member of the supervisory team and a member of the Visa Compliance Team if the student holds a Tier 4 visa.

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 and seek support, they will usually be focussed primarily on making a decision as to whether a student should be withdrawn from the University

due to failure to attend. Notes should be taken and the student should receive a letter confirming the outcome of the hearing within 2 working days, in line with the relevant section in the University General Regulations.

4. Consecutive Missed Attendance (Tier 4 visa students only)

For Tier 4 visa students who have not engaged with the intervention process and have missed two consecutive supervisory meetings, without prior approval or authorised absence, will automatically result in stage three of the Intervention process.

At the formal meeting, the University must assess whether the period of time the student has been absent has affected their ability to complete the course within the visa expiry date. In circumstances where the student has missed more than two consecutive scheduled supervisory meetings, which has resulted in 60 days of non-engagement, the University is required to report the student's Tier 4 visa for curtailment (cancellation).

Appeal

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

School Discretion

It should be noted that where a School does not wish, on the basis of their knowledge of the performance and welfare of a student; to progress with interventions from one stage to the next, even where a student may not have significantly improved their attendance, the School can take that decision, so long as these reasons are properly documented within the School's system to create an audit record. There is no formal requirement for actions to be escalated, other than in cases where the student holds a Tier 4 visa. It should also be noted that where a School wishes to progress more quickly in terms of interventions, based on their knowledge of the student and previous responses to supportive interventions, then Schools can take the decisions to move directly to Stage 2 or 3 where intervention is more formal.