

Engagement Policy

2019-20

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Committee Approval

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This Engagement Policy 2019-20 will be reviewed annually by our Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). Any amendments will be subject to approval by the Academic Committee.

1. Introduction

We recognise the investment that students make, both in time and money, in choosing to pursue a course of higher education and, as a responsible institution, have a duty of care to follow up promptly on matters of non-engagement, whether this be in terms of physical non-attendance at class, or underuse of the digital learning platforms we provide. Following up instances of non-engagement ensures that students can be supported and given every opportunity to succeed. This duty of care is particularly important in relation to any students under the age of 18 or any vulnerable adults¹.

In addition, we are obliged to comply with the requirements of the United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI), the Student Loans Company (SLC) and other agencies which require monitoring and reporting of student activity and engagement. Engagement involves not only attendance at timetabled classes, but also accessing Canvas and eBooks, submission of work etc.

Good student attendance and engagement also contributes positively to the learning experience of fellow classmates.

2. Definition of Engagement

We believe student engagement is the single most important factor contributing to the success of students as well as the institution. Engagement encompasses various activities, formal and informal, interaction with which leads to successful outcomes with regards to the course of study, enhanced student experience and development of graduate level skills.

At Bloomsbury Institute, we have adopted Vicki Trowler's² definition of engagement:

Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution.

3. Scope

This Engagement Policy is a student facing document. Its primary aim is to provide clear information to our students on the importance of attendance and engagement for academic success, personal development and the quality of the student experience, and how we record and monitor each student's engagement.

The scope of this policy is mainly limited to the three desired outcomes:

1. Enhancement of students' learning outcomes
2. Optimising student experience
3. Development of graduate level skills

There are several other elements of interaction which focus on student voice and contribution to institutional decision-making processes. These elements are articulated separately in the Corporate and Academic Governance Framework and are embedded in our practices.

4. Attendance and engagement requirements

Students are required to attend all timetabled classes for their relevant course, unless there are exceptional circumstances preventing them from attending a class. Timetabled classes include lectures, seminars, workshops, and revision sessions.

¹ A definition of "vulnerable adults" can be found in our Safeguarding Policy.

² Trowler, V., 2018. *Student engagement literature review*. The Higher Education Academy, page 3.

Students should note that the academic year is not restricted to timetabled classes or teaching weeks alone, as re-sits generally take place after teaching ends.

Students are also required to engage regularly on Canvas, the Virtual Learning Environment provided by Bloomsbury Institute, to augment the learning which takes place on campus. Canvas provides students with opportunities to review lecture slides, read the resources recommended by teaching staff and engage in discussion with staff and peers.

5. Reasons for engagement

Most students who fail their course do so as a result of not attending class and not engaging with the Virtual Learning environment. Regular attendance requires time discipline and management skills, both of which are beneficial to whichever career a student chooses.

Most importantly, attendance is necessary to:

- enhance your educational development within the area of study
- encourage a sense of belonging and mattering within our academic community
- contribute to the learning of others
- receive information about the course
- prepare for all assessments
- undertake any practical work or group work
- maintain compliance with the UKVI, SLC and other external agencies, as appropriate
- develop skills for the workplace including
 - planning and managing time
 - developing stronger communication skills
 - learning how to give and receive feedback on performance

As mentioned previously, poor attendance and engagement not only affects the student concerned, but also affects that student's peers who rely heavily on the attendance of others for group projects and for peer learning. Peer learning offers the opportunity to develop a number of key transferable skills such as:

- learning how to refine understanding through discussion and explanation
- pooling knowledge and skills
- sharing diverse perspectives
- challenging assumptions

6. Methods of recording attendance

Physical attendance at lectures, seminars and workshops is recorded using a swipe card system. Students' ID cards are used to swipe a reader placed inside each teaching room. Attendance at all teaching sessions is recorded, be they lectures, seminars, workshops, revision sessions or other. Tutors will sometimes take a written register for verification purposes.

Attendance is recorded once per session. If you have a 2-hour seminar, then attendance will be recorded just once for that session. Students can register their presence (i.e. swipe) up to 10 minutes before the beginning of the session, so, if the session starts at 10 am, attendance can be registered from 9.50 am to 10.00 am. From 10.01 am attendance will be recorded as 'late'. When late attendance is recorded, the system notes 'how late' the student was, so we can monitor the actual time you were present during the session. Our Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success team (SEWS) check the attendance data on a weekly basis and will intervene in instances of persistent lateness or absence, or patterns of absence.

Students are expected to respect the integrity of our attendance monitoring system and only swipe their cards to record their own attendance. If a student is found to have swiped in on behalf of another student who is not in the classroom, both students will be referred to SEWS for an interview which could result in a referral to the Academic Registrar for disciplinary action.

Engagement with the Virtual Learning Environment is monitored using data from the system which shows the frequency and length of student interactions on the platform. By reviewing student interaction, SEWS staff can build up a more holistic picture of the student's overall interaction with their course as well as the likelihood of them succeeding on their programme of study.

By using attendance monitoring software combined with data from the Virtual Learning Environment, we are able to record and report on engagement. Students will also be able to view their attendance record.

7. Non-engagement

We monitor engagement carefully on an ongoing basis as part of our overall monitoring of student engagement. We recognise that physical attendance at lectures, seminars and workshops is often indicative of a student's level of engagement overall, so we use engagement monitoring intelligence to contact students who show signs that they may be at risk of non-progression, failure or attrition (dropping out). The approach of our Centre for Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success (SEWS) is always supportive and aims to work with students to find solutions to the problems they may be experiencing, whatever those problems might be.

We recognise that instilling the importance of engagement is imperative in the early weeks of a student's study because behaviours learnt during this period set the tone for later practice. SEWS is particularly active during the first six weeks of the student's first semester in assessing levels of engagement so that decisions can be reached about individual students. SEWS will always emphasise the provision of support within Bloomsbury Institute to students whose engagement gives cause for concern. However, if we have concerns that a student is highly unlikely to engage adequately, we may decide to withdraw a student due to non-engagement. This is covered in our 6-Week Withdrawal procedures (see Appendix A) and our Withdrawal, Study Break and Deferral Policy. In these instances, we will effect a withdrawal of the student according to our internal monitoring procedure.

Additional requirements for students who are sponsored under a Tier 4 licence are detailed in Section 11 of this document.

8. Class changes and cancellations

Rooms and, occasionally, class times are unavoidably subject to change, and it is essential that students check before the following week's classes to see if their timetable has changed. Changes may include a change of time or simply a change of room. Students will be notified for every change via email unless it is a change for a session within the next 24 hours.

For timetable changes that are going to take place within the next 24 hours (e.g. where a class is cancelled because a tutor calls in sick on the day of the class), we will send students a text message, as well as an email. These emails will be sent to the students' institutional email address and texts will be sent to the mobile numbers on our student record system.

It is essential that students keep their contact details up-to-date. In order to change contact details, students should login to their Student Self-service Portal (SSP) and input the change as soon as the change has occurred.

Concessions will not be granted to a student missing a class or arriving late as a result of a change; it is the responsibility of the student to check their timetable and mobile phone for any text messages. The student will simply be marked late or absent, as appropriate.

9. Absences or non-engagement with VLE

9.1 Evidence in cases of absence

The only acceptable evidence in the case of non-engagement (including absence) is valid third-party (i.e. independent) documentary evidence or, in the case of illness, a self-certification form for the first 7 days of illness.

The most common source of disruption to studies is illness. Students should upload to the SSP a self-certification form, for the first 7 days of illness and other documentary evidence of this if the illness lasts longer than 7 days e.g. a letter from their doctor or counsellor to confirm their illness. (The letter should be current and indicate the period affected with precise dates).

For non-medical problems, students should provide corroborating evidence of some kind (e.g. crime reference number if the victim of crime, death certificate or letter from funeral director for bereavement, etc.). If students are not sure how to provide evidence of their circumstances, they should discuss the matter with a SEWS Advisor.

An international student with a Tier 4 Visa is entitled to apply for an authorised absence provided they are able to supply the correct supporting evidence. If their request is approved, it means that they may not be reported to the UKVI for poor attendance, provided that 10 contact points have not been missed. Notification of absence will still be included within their absence percentage.

10. Missed examinations or assignment submissions due to mitigating circumstances

Mitigating circumstances are defined as a serious or acute problem, or an event beyond a student's control or ability to foresee, which has prevented completion of assessment(s) or attendance at examination(s).

It is a student's responsibility to inform the Academic Administration department within Registry about mitigating circumstances. This can be done by making a request via the Student Self-service Portal (SSP). Students must complete the form provided and submit it to SSP. Students will be notified of the decision by Registry through the SSP enquiry.

11. International students reportable to the UKVI

For all students, we consider each timetabled day as a 'contact point' which, if attended, shows a student is engaging with their course. International students who are sponsored by us for their student visa and who fail to attend 10 consecutive contact points will be reported to the UKVI. Such reporting will ordinarily mean that the student's Tier 4 Visa will be cancelled. This may lead to the student's deportation. Students may also be interviewed at a UK border and refused re-entry to the UK after a trip abroad. Visa renewal applications may also be declined due to poor attendance.

12. Related regulations, policies and procedures

- Safeguarding Policy
- Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedures

- Withdrawal, Study Break, and Deferral Policy
- Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedures (University of Northampton)

13. Review of the Engagement Policy

This Engagement Policy 2019-20 will be reviewed annually by our Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). Any amendments will be subject to approval by the Academic Committee.

Appendix A: 6-Week Withdrawal Overview

The process for the 6-week withdrawal of students should be read alongside our:

- Engagement Policy
- Withdrawal, Study Break and Deferral Policy

These documents are available on the QEM:

<http://bit.ly/BILPolicies1>

Students who fail to engage within the first six weeks of their course will be withdrawn. This is stated in our Terms and Conditions for Applicants 2019-20:

10.1 In accordance with the University of Northampton's Academic and Student Regulations, if you fail to engage with your studies without good cause and due notice by the end of the sixth week of the advertised start date of your course, you will be deemed to have withdrawn from the course and your registration will be terminated with Bloomsbury Institute and the University of Northampton. If you are funded through the Student Loans Company, we will inform them of your withdrawal and this will result in the cancellation of your loan. If you are an international student who we have sponsored for a Tier 4 (General) Student Visa, we will inform the UK Visa and Immigration of your withdrawal and this will result in the cancellation of your visa.

If you are withdrawn for non-engagement, you will remain liable for the full tuition fees. For further information see our Withdrawal, Study Break and Deferral Policy.

When we ask students to agree to our Terms and Conditions at enrolment, we draw their attention in particular to Section 10.1.

The purpose of this document is to outline the process and guidelines that are followed to withdraw a student for non-engagement.

Engagement points

In order to establish non-engagement, a number of agreed engagement points will be monitored:

- Induction
- Enrolment on the VLE
- Collection of student card
- Engagement with the VLE
- Attendance in class
- Response to Course Leader email(s)
- Response to Week 2 Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success (SEWS) intervention
- Response to Week 4 SEWS intervention

There is no *formula* for which combination of these will result in withdrawal for non-engagement. A student may fail to attend for 5 weeks and then contact us with reliable evidence for mitigating circumstances, and as a result, the student would not be withdrawn.

Process

As stated above, students are alerted to our 6-week withdrawal for non-engagement rules at the enrolment stage. The policy is flagged again at induction.

The engagement points are monitored by SEWS, with the support of the Academic Division.

Any student who is at risk of being withdrawn will be contacted by SEWS (at least twice) during the first 6 weeks of their studies.

If a student enrolled and started on the course late, the process commences from the first day that the student was able to engage.

The decision to withdraw will be made by the Academic Registrar and the Director of the Centre for Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success.

The decision to withdraw will be made at the end of Week 6.

Appendix B: Sickness Self-certification Form

This form is valid for absences due to illness for up to 7 days. If the absence is longer than 7 consecutive calendar days, then you are required to get a medical certificate from your GP.

This form is only for absence from lectures, workshops and seminars; it does **not cover** missed items of summative assessment (exam, coursework, viva, etc.). If you have missed an item of assessment, you must complete a separate form (either Extension Request form or Mitigating Circumstances form), to be eligible for an extension or re-sit. Please refer to your Student Handbook or Module/Course Leader for further information on these forms.

Notes:

- Only to be used for the first 7 days of illness
- Do not use for assessment extension or mitigating circumstances
- Submit this form through (SSP)

First Name: _____

Surname: _____

Student Number: LON _____

Please give brief details of your sickness:

First day of absence owing to sickness: ____ / ____ / ____

Date of return to class: ____ / ____ / ____

Signature _____

Date ____ / ____ / ____