University of York

Attendance Management Policy for Sponsored International Students

As a Highly Trusted Sponsor of Tier 4 visa-holding students, the University is obliged by the United Kingdom Border Agency to monitor, and be able to demonstrate that, the students we sponsor are attending and engaging appropriately with their studies and are not abusing their visa status. This Policy lays out how the University records and monitors such attendance, and what action is taken where a student fails to attend as required. It has been produced in preparation for creating a more unified means of capturing the record of Tier 4 visa-holding students’ attendance and engagement so that we can efficiently and reliably fulfil our monitoring and reporting duties, and retain our Highly Trusted Status.

1. Purpose of the Policy

   i. To define a common approach for recording student attendance and engagements that will apply to sponsored, Tier 4 visa-holding, taught and research students in all departments.
   ii. To codify the University’s approach to recording visa-holding student attendance and other evidence of academic engagement; and the actions which should ensue if a student fails to maintain an acceptable level of engagement.
   iii. To ensure that University practice is fit for the purpose of evidencing to the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) that we fulfil our duties as a Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS) of students who require Tier 4 (general) visas.
   iv. To clarify where the responsibility currently lies for collecting and holding relevant pieces of information that together comprise our record of attendance and engagement, and to facilitate the development of a more unified institutional arrangement for data collection for the future.

2. Scope

   i. The scope of this policy is limited exclusively to Tier 4 visa-holding students. The Policy embraces all sponsored, Tier 4 visa-holding students registered at the University of York; whether presessional, taught or research. ¹
   ii. This policy does not cover the University’s duty to notify UKBA of those students whose circumstances change, which we are also obliged to comply with in order to

¹ Visiting students who enrol for six months or longer require a Tier 4 visa while those who join us for a shorter duration use a student visa which we are not required to sponsor and which do not bring the same regulatory requirements of Tier 4 visa. HYMS students are out of scope of this Policy as HYMS has separate arrangements for such monitoring. Part time, Distance Learning, Life Long Learning and CPD enrolments are also out of scope unless for any reason not anticipated here such a student is sponsored on a Tier 4 visa to undertake that study.
retain our Highly Trusted Status and does not affect the importance of making sure that the student record system (SITS) is accurate and up to date for all students so that the university can report accurately and in a timely manner to the UKBA and many other official agencies.

3. Regulatory context

i. The UK Border Agency (UKBA) allows the University to sponsor students who require a Tier 4 visa on condition that we fulfil certain duties to deliver assurance that the student is not abusing their visa-holding student status. Among these duties is the requirement that the University monitors and records whether the student is attending and engaging with their studies in line with what the University expect of our students.

ii. The University is required to report to the UKBA, within ten working days, any T4 visa-holding student fails to attend ten consecutive required events without authorisation, and any authorised leave of absence of more than 60 days. Where a T4 visa-holding student is reported as failing to attend, or having taken such a leave of absence, their visa is likely to be withdrawn and they are likely to be required to leave the country.

iii. The University of York approach to monitoring the attendance and engagement of sponsored students is to focus expectations on those points of contact which are expected of consistently of all taught students, and all research students.

iv. The University’s Supervision Policy requires supervisors to ‘urge’ taught students to attend at least one supervision meeting per term. Almost all departments require students to attend two supervision meetings per term. **This Attendance Management Policy requires that for sponsored taught students, attendance at two supervision meetings per term are recorded, and unauthorised non-attendance is acted upon.** Such supervision meetings could take the form of a one to one meeting or could be group-based. (Alternatively, where a department offers only one supervision meeting per term the second recorded meeting can be a seminar that students and seminar leaders are aware is being recorded as if it was a supervision for the purpose of the Tier 4 monitoring requirement.)

v. Regulation 2.4(d) requires research students to meet their supervisor not less than twice a term. The Notes for Guidance for students, supervisors and examiners, require that research students on MPhil, PhD and EngD programmes to attend a Thesis Advisory Panel at least twice a year. **This Attendance Management Policy requires that for sponsored research students, attendance at these two supervisions and TAP meetings is recorded and unauthorised non-attendance is acted upon.**

vi. Departmental Boards of Studies define the nature and regularity of open and closed summative assessments for their students but these must be consistent with the University Regulations and the Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and
Feedback. These are defined in the Written Statement of Assessment. This Attendance Management Policy requires that any unauthorised non-submission of open summative assessments, or non-attendance at closed assessments, is acted upon.

vii. Departments that contribute to combined programmes must consider the assessment and performance of combined programme students with the same rigor as they do for student on single-subject programmes. The department which takes responsibility for supervisory support for the student (as per the arrangements per the Revised University Policy on Undergraduate Supervision 2011 – 2016) is the department which should monitor the attendance of the student on a combined degree. This is called the ‘host’ department. 2

4. Centrally held records of attendance and engagement and Summer, non-teaching term contact points

i. In addition to the supervisions, Thesis Advisory Panel meetings and summative assessments, the attendance of sponsored students is monitored by Registry Services at the following points;
   a. Enrolment
   b. Attendance at the visa clinic for all newly enrolled students
   c. Three attendance confirmation checkpoints per year (two for those who attend the visa clinic)

ii. There should be three recorded points of contact with students on taught postgraduate programmes undertaking an ISM, and three recorded points of contact with research students; during the summer, non-teaching term. These records should take the most appropriate form for the work that the student is engaged in during that time and should be held by the relevant department along with the other evidence of the student’s attendance and engagement. 

5. Recording attendance and authorising non-attendance

i. Where a digital record of the contact exists this should wherever possible be fed directly into a central system for attendance recording. In the absence of having the functionality to capture records of all these points of contact in SITS the department (or host department for combined programme students) is responsible for recording monitoring and managing attendance of their students. Where a manual record is made this should be recorded digitally for feeding into a central system as quickly as possible after the event and not later than two weeks after the expected contact point.

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2 This arrangement may be subject to locally agreed variation where there are more than two departments involved in a programme of study (PEP) but the responsibility for monitoring, recording, and for flowing up unauthorised non-attendance should be clear.
ii. The UKBA are deliberately not prescriptive about what they consider to be an authorised absence but they do say that if such absence means that the student will not be able to complete their studies within the original time frame they should take a leave of absence rather than have such absence authorised by the sponsor. Authorisation of absence or of the failure to summit assignments or attend closed assessments by Tier 4 students should follow usual University and departments procedures for sickness absence and mitigating circumstances; and such authorisation should be marked in the relevant records within two weeks of the event.

6. Communication to Tier 4 students regarding their duties as sponsored students

Students who are issued with a CAS with which to apply for a Tier 4 visa will be told when the CAS is issued that as a sponsored Tier 4 visa student they will be expected to comply with this Attendance Management Policy.

7. Response in the event of unauthorised failure to keep expected points of contact.

i. It is the (host) department’s responsibility to maintain an up to date record of the sponsored student’s attendance at supervisions, Thesis Advisor Panel meetings, and to monitor this and unauthorised failure to submit open assessments and attend closed assessments. It is also the host department’s responsibility to maintain a record of engagement for students who are on placement.

ii. After a maximum of five consecutive unauthorised failures to keep the expected points of contact the student should be called to a meeting with their academic supervisor and warned that they are jeopardising their academic progress and their visa status. ³

iii. If the student fails to respond to two such meeting requests, or continues to fail to keep a further two of their expected points of contact without authorisation, the supervisor or departmental administrator should discuss the student’s case with the Tier 4 Compliance Officer in Registry Services. Registry Services will then contact the student to
   a. encourage them to attend or engage,
   b. encourage them to contact their department to let them know of any circumstances which may be preventing their attendance or engagement, so

³ For pedagogic and pastoral reasons the supervisor may well contact the student after fewer expected points of contact are missed without authorisation. Unauthorised failure to sit or to submit summative assessments may well jeopardise the student’s academic progress which in turn could jeopardise their visa status. Such failure should inevitably result in action by the department to contact the student.
that the department can consider regularising such non-attendance by
authorising it or supporting a leave of absence request,
c. warn them that their unauthorised failure to engage jeopardises their
academic progress and
d. warn them that continued failure to respond to encouragement to engage
could result in their sponsorship, and visa, being withdrawn.

iv. The Tier 4 Compliance Officer, will from time to time monitor, the centrally held
records of sponsored student attendance to identify those students where there are
consecutive incidents of unauthorised non-attendance in order to alert the relevant
department of the need to pay close attention to the risk of the student failing to
attend five events without authorisation.
v. In the event that there are ten unauthorised non attendances the Tier 4 Compliance
officer will discuss the student’s case with the Academic Registrar or Director of
Registry Services with a view to considering whether the University should continue
to sponsor the student.
vi. In the event that the student responds to the encouragement to engage and an
expected point of contact is made the record of unauthorised failures to attend
reverts to zero but if the student’s record shows that five consecutive expected points
have not been kept the department and Tier 4 Compliance Officer should pay close
attention to the student’s attendance in future.

8. Placement students.

i. Students on placement, whether in term time or the vacation are expected to produce
some written evidence of their activity and learning whilst on the placement. This
should be verified by the placement host who can be the student’s placement
supervisor, mentor or employer.

ii. The placement host is empowered to authorise non-attendance and should report to
the Course Director within one week if a sponsored placement student has missed
work. While students are on placement each working day is considered an
expected point of contact. The placement host should notify the course director of
any unauthorised non-attendance within one week. It is the responsibility of the
Course Director to ensure that the placement host is aware of and undertakes these
duties. Consecutive failures to attend should be acted upon in the usual manner,
with the Course Director taking responsibility for liaising between the placement
host, the supervisor the student and Registry Services.
9. **Pre-sessional Students in the Centre for English Language Teaching.**

A daily register of attendance taken of students attending pre-sessional programmes, including the Graduate Certificate in English language teaching. Unauthorised failure to attend for three consecutive days is brought to the attention of the programme leader by the class tutor and arrangements should be made to contact the student and or Registry Services in line with the steps outlined in 7 above.

Summary of engagement points and responsibly for monitoring.

For (host) Academic Departments to record and manage;
- Two supervision meetings per term, taught and research students, delivered as one to one or in groups (or equivalent if one seminar is recorded in lieu of one supervision meeting each term).
- Thesis advisory panel
- All summative, open and closed assessments
- Three points of contact during the summer non-teaching term for ISM and research students.
- Record of engagement for placement students.

For Registry Services to record and manage;
- Enrolment
- Visa clinic
- Re-enrolment (x2 for first year students and x 3 for continuing students)