

University of York

Attendance and Engagement Management Policy for Student Visa holders

Summary:

“The ability to sponsor students to study in the UK is a privilege that must be earned. When a sponsor is granted a Student sponsor licence, significant trust is placed in them. With that trust comes a responsibility placed on sponsors to act in accordance with the Immigration Rules and the sponsor guidance. UKVI has a duty to ensure that all sponsors discharge these responsibilities, and that a sponsor’s actions (or omissions) do not create a risk to immigration control.” - Student Sponsor Guidance, Document 3, Section 3

As a sponsor of Student Visa holders, the University is obliged by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) to monitor its Student Visa holders and be able to demonstrate that those students are attending and engaging appropriately with their studies. This provides the assurance that students are fully compliant with the requirements of their visa status. Failure to monitor student attendance effectively is classed as a serious compliance breach and could result in the University’s sponsorship licence being withdrawn. This Policy lays out how the University records and monitors such attendance, and what action is taken where a student fails to attend or engage as required. We will continue to ensure that the University does all that it can to support the ongoing engagement of our Student Visa holders, enabling them to successfully complete their programme of studies.

We will monitor Student Visa holders’ engagement and attendance through our established attendance monitoring processes for Student Visa holders. In addition, the University may also refer to data it holds in relation to visa holding students’ attendance and engagement in their studies (including their use of the University’s Virtual Learning Environment) to provide additional information to the UKVI about compliance if required.

The University reserves the right to update this Policy at any point in order to remain compliant with our sponsorship duties as laid out by UKVI.

1. Purpose of the Policy

- a. To describe our approach for recording Student Visa holders’ attendance and engagement, focusing expectations on those engagement points which are already consistently expected of all the wider student population
- b. To document clearly the University’s approach to monitoring the attendance and engagement of Student Visa holders.
- c. To outline the systems used to record Student Visa holders’ attendance and other evidence of academic engagement
- d. To describe those actions to be followed if a student fails to maintain an acceptable level of engagement
- e. To specify where the responsibility lies for collecting and monitoring the relevant items of data that together comprise our record of attendance and academic engagement

- f. To provide guidance to enable the University to fulfil its attendance monitoring duties as a sponsor of Student Visa holders.
- g. To outline the consequences for students who are not compliant with the requirements of this policy
- h. To describe any agreed exceptions to the above

2. Scope

- a. The scope of this policy is limited exclusively to Student Visa holding students.
- b. The Policy covers all Student Visa holders who are currently sponsored by the University of York, including those on visiting, taught and research programmes, unless specifically covered by the exclusions below:
 - i. Hull York Medical School (HYMS) students are out of the scope of this Policy as HYMS has separate arrangements for such monitoring.
 - ii. Students studying at the International Pathway College (IPC) are out of the scope of this Policy as the IPC has separate arrangements for such monitoring. This includes pre-sessional English programmes.

3. Regulatory context

- a. The UKVI permits the University to sponsor students who require a Student visa on condition that we fulfil certain duties in line with the Student Visa Sponsorship Guidance and Immigration Rules. We need to deliver assurance that the student is complying with the conditions of their visa. Among these duties is the requirement that the University is able to demonstrate that it monitors and records whether the student is attending and engaging with their studies in line with what the University expects of our students. Failure to monitor student attendance effectively would be seen as a serious compliance breach and could result in the University's licence being withdrawn.
- b. The University is required to report any students who have missed 10 consecutive expected points of contacts without explicit prior permission. At that point we are required to withdraw sponsorship of the student. The Visa Compliance team will monitor this engagement on a termly basis and advise appropriate action.
- c. The University is also required to report to the UKVI within ten working days any Student Visa holder who:
 - has withdrawn from their studies
 - is assumed to have withdrawn from their studies
 - has changed their course of study
 - has any authorised leave of absence of more than 60 days
- d. Where a Student Visa holder is reported as failing to attend, or having taken such a leave of absence, their visa will be withdrawn and they will be required to leave the country.

4. Authorised Absences

- a. University regulations 2.5 and 6.4 state that students may be absent from their designated place of instruction during periods of study provided they are not away at any time at which academic engagements, including thesis advisory panel meetings, have been arranged.
- b. The University's term dates for taught programmes of studies can be found [here](#). Students are expected to be in attendance during term time. Research students are expected to be in attendance for the full calendar year, excluding public holidays and the University end of year closure. Research students may request to have a period excluded as a period of study at any point during the year as annual leave, but only with the permission of their supervisor or the Chair of Board of Studies, and to a maximum of 30 days in any given academic year.
- c. Academic Departments may additionally authorise discretionary absences of up to 30 days for both Taught and Research Students. These should be requested in advance and should only be granted if the Academic Supervisor agrees that the absence will not unduly affect the student's studies and on the understanding that the student will complete their studies within their normal registration period (i.e. without a change to the student's submission deadline or expected end date).
- d. Research Students can additionally request absences of between 31 - 60 days of authorised absence without curtailment of their visa, but these must be approved by the Research Special Cases Committee. All absences should be requested in advance and will only be granted if the Academic Supervisor agrees that the absence will not unduly affect the student's studies. Students who apply for an authorised absence of up to 60 days must be made aware that the circumstances leading to this absence will not be considered to be valid grounds for a change to their submission deadline or expected end date.
- e. Where a Research student needs to take a period of leave and wishes this to be reflected in their submission deadline, they must apply for a formal leave of absence. If this is approved, their visa will be curtailed. They will need to leave the UK and apply for a new visa to re-start their programme of study.
- f. During any period of authorised absence students must continue to meet their expected engagement points. All authorised absences must be marked by the Academic Department in the SITS Student Record System at the point the absence is approved to allow appropriate monitoring of the student's return to studies.
- g. For the purpose of monitoring, periods of research leave or fieldwork also need to be recorded in the SITS Student Record System. These will not count towards the 31-60 day absence limit but will be reported to the UKVI as a change in study location.

5. Communications

- a. Students who are issued with a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) with which to apply for a Student visa will be told when the CAS is issued that as a sponsored Student visa holder they will be expected to comply with this Attendance Management Policy. Students will also be asked to confirm that they are complying with this policy at each Student visa re-enrolment window.

6. Summary of engagement points and responsibly for monitoring

- a. For the purpose of this policy "Academic Department" refers to the department in which the student is registered in the SITS Student Record System. In the case of joint departments, this will be the 'main' department as recorded in the SITS Student Record System. This information is recorded in the Student Course Enrolment (SCE) record for the avoidance of doubt.
- b. Academic Departments are responsible for recording and managing the following:
 - i. Two supervision meetings per teaching term for all taught students, delivered as one to one or in groups (or equivalent if one seminar is recorded in lieu of one supervision meeting each term)
 - ii. Three engagement points during the summer non-teaching term for Taught Masters students
 - iii. Eight Formal Supervision meeting per 12 month period for all Research students, with an expectation of 1 meeting at least every 6-7 weeks¹
 - iv. Thesis Advisory Panel for Research students at least once in every six-month period for full time students
 - v. All summative, open and closed assessments for Taught students
 - vi. Completion of the Academic Integrity tutorial (all students)
 - vii. Record of engagement for placement and study abroad students
- c. More detailed information about these duties can be found in Section 7 below.
- d. Student Services is responsible for recording and managing the following:
 - i. University Enrolment (once per academic year)
 - ii. Student visa holder registration activity (at the start of programme)
 - iii. Student visa holder re-enrolment (x2 for first year students and x3 for continuing students)
 - iv. Record of engagement for Doctorate Extension Scheme students (DES) (x3 scheduled engagement points)

If departments have concerns about a student's engagement, ie a student has missed engagement points, they should advise the Visa Compliance team in Student Services as early as possible tier4@york.ac.uk. This will enable us to provide appropriate information, guidance and support.

7. Detailed information for Academic Departments

This section provides detailed information for those engagements to be managed by Academic Departments.

a. Supervision: Taught students

- i. The University's [Policy](#) on Taught Student Supervision requires supervisors to schedule at least one individual supervision meeting per term for all taught students.
- ii. This Attendance and Engagement Management Policy requires that for Student visa holders, two supervision meetings a term should be scheduled for all teaching terms.

¹ As per section 7b, this frequency of meetings applies during the normal period of enrolment, during any continuation ('writing up') or extension period, during the period a student is 'under examination' (i.e. the period between submission of the thesis and the viva, where relevant), and during any period following examination where a student has received a 'revise and resubmit' outcome.

Approved by Senate: M12-13/22 refers, revised policy approved May 2018

Approved by Teaching Committee: M12-13/68 refers, revised (March 2018) policy approved by Chair's Action 16/03/18 (M17-18/133 refers), revised (October 2020) policy approved by Chair's Action 12/10/20

The first supervision should be the same as for all taught students; the second may be a further formal one to one meeting with the supervisor or could be group-based. Alternatively, where a department offers only one supervision meeting per term the second recorded meeting can be a predefined seminar or alternative meeting type eg project review meeting. If selecting to use a seminar, both students and seminar/meeting leader(s) must be aware in advance that the seminar is being recorded as if it was a supervision engagement for the purpose of the Student visa holder monitoring requirement. Both meetings must be recorded in e:vision as Supervision meeting types.

- iii. Student Services will require all Academic Departments to specify at the start of each Academic year which engagements (two one- to- one supervision or combination of supervision and seminar) will be held each term. Where an alternative meeting type is being used for the second supervision, this will need to be advised to Student Services at the start of each Academic year.
- iv. There must be three recorded engagement points with students on taught postgraduate programmes undertaking an independent study module (ISM) during the Summer Vacation period. 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 department along with the other evidence of the student's attendance and engagement.
- v. If a student leaves the UK before the end of the ISM period and submits from their home county, they must inform the Visa Compliance team who will need to report the departure to the UKVI. At this point sponsorship will be withdrawn. Before leaving the UK, the student must:
 - seek prior authorisation from the Chair of Board of Studies, Director of Postgraduate Programmes and their Supervisor
 - ensure that the ISM/Dissertation is received by the department on the agreed deadline; and
 - agree that leaving the UK will result in their right to remain in the UK being withdrawn
- vi. Visiting students studying on Taught programmes of study are subject to the same attendance requirements as all other taught students during their registration at York.

This policy requires that all Supervision meetings for Taught students be recorded in SITS as quickly as possible after the event, and not later than two weeks after the expected engagement point. If Academic Departments identify unauthorised non-attendance they must contact the student and seek an explanation. They must also require the student to demonstrate continued engagement with the Programme of Studies.

b. Supervision and TAP meetings: Research students

- i. The [Policy](#) on Research Degrees (PoRD) requires all Research students to attend formal Supervision meetings eight times per year, with an expectation of one meeting at least every 6-7 weeks during the normal enrolment period. The PoRD also requires full-time

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research students to attend a Thesis Advisory Panel at least once in every six-month period (ie in months 1-6, 7-12, 13-18, etc) during the normal enrolment period.

This policy requires that all supervision and TAP meetings for Research students be recorded as quickly as possible after the event, and not later than two weeks after the expected engagement point. Meetings should be recorded in SkillsForge which will feed back into the SITS Student

records system. Any missed engagement needs to be recorded as authorised or unauthorised through the Student visa holder tracker in e:vision.

If Academic Departments identify unauthorised non-attendance they must contact the student and seek an explanation. They must also require the student to demonstrate continued engagement with the Programme of Studies.

In addition, where a sponsored Research student enters the continuation period (as defined by the PoRD), formal Supervision meetings are required to continue at the same regularity as during the normal enrolment period.

Students who are under examination, extend their studies or who receive a 'revise and resubmit' outcome at examination continue to be sponsored for a Student visa must continue to adhere to this Attendance Monitoring Policy. Formal Supervision meetings are required to continue at the same regularity as during the normal enrolment period and these must be recorded in the same way.

Visiting students studying on research programmes will not be required to attend a Thesis Advisory Panel (TAP) meeting. With the exception of the TAP, visiting students studying on research programmes of study are subject to the same attendance requirements as all other research students during their registration at York.

c. Summative, open and closed assessments for Taught students

- i. Departmental Boards of Studies define the nature and regularity of open and closed summative assessments for their Taught 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 and Engagement Management Policy requires that any unauthorised non-submission of open summative assessments, or non-attendance at closed assessments, is acted upon to seek explanation of non-engagement and confirm continued engagement with the Programme of Studies.

All summative assessments are recorded in the SITS student record system. Where a student does not submit an assessment a non-submission grade should be entered as soon as this is known.

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Departments contributing to combined programmes must consider the assessment and performance of combined programme students with the same rigour as they do for students on single-subject programmes.

The UKVI requires that the University clearly inform all students of their course dates. These dates inform the period of leave to remain a student is granted following the completion of their

programme. These dates are recorded on the CAS when issued and will be reflected in SITS as the student's expected end date.

Academic departments are advised that in line with UKVI guidance, the final assessment component of a taught programme must not be more than two weeks prior to the end date recorded on the student's CAS. Any earlier submissions would need to be reported and will be considered to be a breach of sponsorship duties

d. Completion of the Academic/Research Integrity tutorial (all students)

- i. The University requires that all students complete either an Academic Integrity or Research Integrity tutorial. This must be completed as a compulsory progression requirement and completion is monitored by the Academic Department.

e. Record of engagement for placement and study abroad 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. 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 accordance with Departmental policies, with the Course Director taking responsibility for liaising between the placement host, the supervisor, the student and Student Services.
- iii. Supervisory arrangements in place for Student visa holders whilst at York should continue in an agreed format during the placement. A minimum of two supervision interactions per term should be recorded as for other Taught Student visa holders; placements lasting five weeks or less, should include a minimum of one recorded interaction. These should be recorded in SITS as in a) above.
- iv. Placement students should keep in contact with their placement/academic supervisors by email/telephone/letter/fax/skype and agreement reached with the student before

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departure for the placement regarding the frequency and method of communications.

These arrangements may be supplemented by the role of the exchange/placement co-ordinator where appropriate.

- v. If the student fails to keep two of their expected engagement points without authorisation, the supervisor or departmental administrator should discuss the student's case with the Deputy Director: Student Services, with responsibility for Student visa compliance, as soon as this is raised.
 - vi. Students on placement will also have summative assessments which will need to be recorded as in c) above.
- f. **Students on fieldwork or research away from the University**
- i. Supervisory arrangements in place for Student visa holders whilst at York should continue in an agreed form during a period of fieldwork or research away from the University. The period of absence should be recorded in the SITS Student Record System as a period of authorised absence, and the relevant engagement points updated as detailed above.
 - ii. Students away from the University should keep in contact with their academic supervisors by email/telephone/letter/fax/Skype and agreement reached with the student before departure for the fieldwork or research placement regarding the frequency and method of communications.

8. Centrally held records of attendance and engagement

- a. This section provides detailed information for those engagements to be managed by Student Services.
- b. **University Enrolment (once per academic year)**

University Regulation 8.1 states that all students are required to enrol at the start of each academic year of their programme of study and following any period of suspension of studies. Student Services is responsible for ensuring that students complete their enrolment to specified deadlines. Students who fail to enrol will be in breach of their conditions of sponsorship.
- c. **Student visa holders registration activity**

All new Student visa holders are required to attend a Student visa holders registration event within two weeks of joining the University. At this session they are required to verify their ID, their qualifications and their passport and visa information. Failure to attend this event will result in the student not meeting the conditions of their sponsorship.
- d. **Student Visa holders re-enrolment**

All Student visa holders are required to complete a re-registration process from a University Campus PC on a termly basis. Failure to re-enrol will result in the student not meeting the conditions of their sponsorship.

Students on authorised absences, fieldwork or research will be permitted to re-enrol away from campus. Students should contact the Visa Compliance Team to make arrangements.

e. Record of engagement for Doctorate Extension Scheme (DES) students

Students sponsored under the DES are required to maintain four scheduled engagement points during the twelve months of sponsorship. Students who do not maintain their scheduled engagement points will be considered to be in breach of their visa obligations under the DES and sponsorship will be curtailed.

If students decide not to continue with the scheme, they must contact the Visa Compliance Team as soon as the decision is made and their sponsorship will be curtailed within 10 working days.

9. Non compliance with this Policy

- a. On a termly basis, Student Services will access all engagement data for Student visa holders via an electronic engagement tracker. This displays all the engagement points identified in this Policy.
- b. Academic Departments also have access to this electronic information and are expected to be monitoring for completeness, accuracy, timeliness and any potential causes for concern with their students throughout the academic year. The check by Student Services should be a formality to ensure compliance risks are minimised.
- c. Academic Departments must be prepared to provide this information outside of the normal termly check should need arise eg in the event of an audit.
- d. Where records show a student to have missed two consecutive engagement points without authorisation, the Visa Compliance team will contact the relevant Academic Department to check that the student is still engaging with their Programme of Studies. At this point no further action will be taken if the student is in attendance, but the Academic Department will be required to update any gaps in the record and demonstrate if needed what action has been taken to ensure that students meet their engagement points in future.
- e. If a student is not in attendance, the Academic Department should follow the steps outlined in University's Assumed Withdrawal [Policy](#).
- f. Where records show a student to have missed four consecutive engagement points without authorisation, the Visa Compliance team will contact the relevant Academic Department to check that the student is still engaging with their Programme of Studies.
- g. The Academic Department will be required to update any gaps in the record and demonstrate if needed what action has been taken to ensure that students meet their engagement points in future.
- h. If the Academic Department is not satisfied that the student is engaging, it must call the student to a formal meeting with their academic supervisor. The student must be advised that they are jeopardising their academic progress and their visa status. In accordance with the University's Assumed Withdrawal Policy, it is likely that contact will have been made with the student before four engagement points are missed as contact should be made where there is no evidence of engagement for four weeks. Academic Departments may at this stage wish to seek advice from the University's Immigration Advice Service immigration@york.ac.uk

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- i. If the student fails to respond to two such meeting requests, or continues to fail to keep a further two expected engagement points without authorisation, the supervisor/ departmental manager should refer the case to the Deputy Director: Student Services with responsibility for Student Visa Compliance. The Visa Compliance team will then formally contact the student to:
 - i. advise them to attend or engage
 - ii. request that they contact their Academic Department to let it know of any circumstances which may be preventing their attendance or engagement, so that the department can consider regularising such non-attendance by authorising it or supporting a leave of absence request,
 - iii. warn them that their unauthorised failure to engage jeopardises their academic progress and
 - iv. warn them that continued failure to engage could result in their sponsorship and visa being withdrawn and to the University assuming that they have withdrawn from their studies.
- j. Any student missing ten consecutive engagement points without authorisation will be withdrawn from their studies and sponsorship withdrawn in accordance with UKVI requirements.
- k. For students sponsored under the DES, in the event of an unauthorised failure to keep one expected engagement point, Student Services will contact the Student to warn them that failure to respond to engage could result in their sponsorship and visa being withdrawn, and to the University assuming that they have withdrawn from the DES.
- l. In the event of an unauthorised failure to keep one expected engagement point and failure to respond to subsequent communication, the Deputy Director: Student Services will refer the student's case to the Director of Student Services & Deputy Academic Registrar, with a view to curtailing sponsorship for the DES.