



**STUDENT ATTENDANCE**

**&**

**ENGAGEMENT POLICY**

**2009/2010**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Research on student experience, retention and success suggests that students who attend classes are more likely to be retained and to be successful in their studies. Reasons for this include:
- i) Regular attendance and academic achievement are closely linked. Students who attend all scheduled classes are more likely to enjoy a rewarding experience in which core skills and abilities, such as team working, are developed;
  - ii) Students are more likely to become part of the student and academic community for their subject area, and are much more likely to develop a cohort identity.
- 1.2 In a contemporary higher education context where students often have complex lives, with family responsibilities, and part-time jobs, which are necessary to finance their studies, the classroom and classroom contact are vitally important aspects of the learning experience and of engaging with life at university. As a result, it is important to develop strategies to encourage full attendance, and to help students to see the value of full engagement with their studies. The University of the West of Scotland has therefore decided to develop a policy, and procedures, to encourage *supportive* monitoring of attendance.
- 1.3 It should also be noted that attendance by students is important because many students benefit from peer learning and support and that this is particularly relevant in the development of interpersonal skills which are included in the learning outcomes of many programmes.
- 1.4 The University will monitor and manage attendance within a supportive and pastoral environment to assist students in managing their welfare and academic progression. The University of the West of Scotland has therefore decided to develop a policy and procedures to encourage *supportive* monitoring of attendance. The policy applies to both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes.
- 1.5 The University recognises that while postgraduate research students have different patterns of attendance and engagement from taught students, similar benefits will be achieved by applying this policy through specific procedures for research students.

## **2. Scope**

- 2.1 This policy applies to all students registered for awards of the University.

## **3. Aims and Objectives**

- 3.1 In developing this policy, the University aims to:

- 3.1.1 Support and encourage students to achieve their full potential in their studies and in developing lifelong skills and competencies;
- 3.1.2 Enhance the overall learning environment by encouraging active participation through full attendance for all areas of study;
- 3.1.3 Provide guidance on why attendance is important;
- 3.1.4 Use attendance as one of the factors to be taken into account in reviewing a student's commitment to, and performance in, their academic studies in developing an appropriate response to specific concerns about performance;
- 3.1.5 Provide a framework for supportive procedures to be established across the University.
- 3.1.6 Meet the obligations of UK Borders Agency requirements with regard to international students, ensuring that records are kept and significant absences reported. It should be noted that reporting failure to enrol on a course, non-attendance and discontinuation of course is mandatory.

#### **4. Policy Statement**

- 4.1 It is expected that any student who enrolls on a programme at the University should do so with the intention of achieving the qualification. Academic achievement is therefore the overriding criterion.
- 4.2 It is expected that students will attend all scheduled classes as part of their engagement with their programme of study. If students do not attend classes for a period of two weeks, and do not offer a valid reason for their absence, the poor attendance procedure (see Appendix 1) will be invoked.
- 4.3 This policy sets out the minimum level of attendance and engagement required before the poor attendance procedures will be invoked. It should be noted that some programmes may require a level of attendance above this minimum in accordance with external professional or statutory body requirements or specific funding arrangements. Students must be informed of any specific requirements which are in addition to the minimum requirements of the University before commencing their studies. A statement relating to attendance which clearly outlines attendance requirements and the consequences of non-attendance must be incorporated into all relevant student handbooks.
- 4.4 Attendance registers will be kept by academic staff; student absence or failure to make required contact with staff will be reported in line with the University's procedures.
- 4.5 Regular contact will be maintained with each individual student. There is a general requirement for distance learning and students on Post Graduate programmes who are writing dissertations to maintain contact with

supervisors (or named nominee) on a fortnightly basis (e.g. via email or other specified means of contact).

- 4.6 Full-time research students are expected to commit 35 hours per week towards their studies. However, attendance in University and typical interaction with supervisory teams may vary, with both subject discipline and individual project.

As part of the supervisor/student interaction, these patterns of attendance and interaction are negotiated and agreed and, from September 2009, all Directors of Studies will document in their offer conditions a minimum cycle of regular meetings with each individual student.

As a minimum, all students will be required to attend a monthly meeting with their Director of Studies. Failure to attend this meeting without an appropriate reason will result in the Director of Studies invoking the procedure for poor attendance.

- 4.7 The University will make three attempts to contact a student who has been identified as having poor attendance. The University will make every effort to assist the student to continue with their studies and the purpose of the contact is to ascertain how the student may be helped to continue their study. If there is no response to any of these attempts to contact the student or if attendance does not improve, the Head of School will arrange a School Panel to be held to discuss the case. The School Panel would comprise the Head of School (Chair) and two senior academic members of staff (not involved in the teaching on the programme the student is involved). If a decision to withdraw the student is reached, the Head of School would ensure that a withdrawal form was completed and sent to Student Administration Services who would immediately process the withdrawal, informing all University departments and external bodies, including the UKBA if relevant.
- 4.8 It is the student's responsibility to inform the University of any periods of illness or other valid reasons for non-attendance.

## **5. Right of Appeal**

A student will have the right of appeal against a decision of withdrawal on attendance grounds. Students should lodge an appeal in writing to the Faculty Manager within 5 working days following receipt of a formal withdrawal letter. If appealing against the decision of a School withdrawing a student on the grounds of non-attendance, the University's Academic Appeals Policy and Procedures should be followed. A copy of the policy is available at [www.uws.ac.uk/students/](http://www.uws.ac.uk/students/).

## **6. Evaluation**

Following the first year of implementation, a review of this policy will be undertaken. Thereafter, the policy will be reviewed on the University's standard 3-year cycle.

### Attendance Procedures

1. All students must be advised about attendance requirements in respect of each element of the programme of study and the importance of attending classes or otherwise engaging in the delivered elements of the programme (such as for distance or on-line learning), both orally and in writing, through mechanisms such as induction events, student handbooks etc. Programme specifications, module descriptors and supporting module and programme handbooks must list compulsory attendance requirements of the module.
2. Students must be informed that it is their responsibility to keep the University informed of any periods of absence. They must be informed that they must contact their relevant School if they are unable to attend classes. Students must inform the appropriate person (Module Co-ordinator, Programme Leader or Faculty contact, as indicated in the module programme handbooks) of any planned absence where this is known in advance. Where unforeseen absence occurs, students must provide self-certification as soon as is practicable and, if the absence is for longer than 7 consecutive days, provide supporting evidence of the reason(s) for non-attendance, e.g. medical certificate.
3. The Module Co-ordinator would be accountable for ensuring that the appropriate teaching staff were made aware of the classes where they were required to take registers and for ensuring that these records are maintained. It is the responsibility of the member of the teaching staff responsible for taking the register to notify the identified individual responsible for absence monitoring, of the student's continued absence.
4. Where there is a specified attendance requirement for modules and/or programmes, it is the responsibility of the Module Co-ordinator or Programme Leader to ensure appropriate records are maintained.
5. Students must be informed that, in certain circumstances, failure to attend a module could result in non-progression at end of academic year.
6. Procedure for Dealing with Poor Attendance

When poor attendance has been highlighted, the following 4-stage process should be implemented by individual Schools. In order to assist the individuals responsible for absence monitoring, reports would be made available from Banner, listing all students who have been sent absence letters and their stages within the process.

#### 6.1 Stage 1 (Student missing for 2 weeks)

The individual responsible for absence monitoring would arrange for a Stage 1 absence letter to be sent to the student asking him/her to make immediate contact with a named member of staff. The individual responsible for absence monitoring would arrange for the sending of Letter 1 to be tracked. **(The letter should be sent immediately when 2 weeks absence is identified).**

A letter should be sent to the student, marked Private and Confidential (to term time address and home address via email). This letter may be signed by a member of staff e.g., Faculty Manager, authorised by the Head of School. The letter should state clearly the reason for writing (for example: the student has not attended classes for two weeks).

It should also state that poor attendance is a matter which is taken very seriously by the School and the University. The relevant UWS Regulations should be clearly identified (the student should already have copies) and the possible eventual outcome of continued poor attendance stated clearly (the student may be assumed to have withdrawn or may be required to withdraw from the programme).

There should be a clear explanation of what the student must do to avoid further action being taken against him/her (improve attendance immediately, get in touch with a named member of staff by a specified date, provide reasons for the absence/s if there are any). There should also be a statement giving encouragement to the student to make contact and assurances that the School will consider sympathetically any problems which the student has experienced which have caused his/her non-attendance.

Copies of all correspondence should be kept, and the student so informed.

## 6.2 Stage 2

**(Stage 2 should be followed immediately when 3 weeks absence is identified).**

If there is no response to this first letter and the student is still absent, the individual responsible would arrange for a Stage 2 absence letter to be sent to the student asking him/her to make immediate contact with a named member of staff and warning him/her that this may result in him/her being withdrawn from the module/programme as appropriate. A first letter may have been signed by the Faculty Manager or nominee, but this time the letter should be signed by the Personal Tutor or a member of the academic or related staff, authorised by the Head of School to signify the seriousness of the situation. The letter should refer to the first letter/previous stage of the action taken and reiterate all the points made in the first letter. This letter should constitute a formal warning to the student. The letter should state that if the student does not attend (or make contact to arrange a different time) further action will be taken. The individual responsible for absence monitoring would arrange for the sending of Letter 2 to be tracked.

## 6.3 Stage 3

If after a further week the student had still not made contact with the named member of staff and was still absent, a Stage 3 absence letter would be sent to the student. The individual responsible for absence monitoring would arrange for the sending of Letter 3 to be tracked. This letter should be sent by recorded delivery to both home and term addresses. It should refer to

previous action taken and should reiterate the points made in the previous letters. It should invite the student to a meeting with a senior member of staff dealing with poor attendance. It should constitute a final warning and it should make clear that if the student does not attend (or make contact to arrange a different time) then they will be withdrawn from their programme of study.

#### 6.4 Stage 4

At this stage the Head of School would hold a School Panel. The School Panel would comprise the Head of School (Chair) and two senior academic members of staff (not involved in the teaching on the programme the student is involved). If a decision to withdraw the student is reached, the Head of School would ensure that a withdrawal form was completed and sent to Student Administration Services who would immediately process the withdrawal, informing all University departments and external bodies, including the UKBA if relevant.

### Attendance Procedures (Research Programmes)

1. Research students must be advised about attendance requirements in respect of their programme of study and the importance of regular engagement with their supervisory team, including attending a monthly meeting with their Director of Studies. This will be reinforced both orally and in writing, through mechanisms such as induction events, student handbooks etc.
2. Students must be informed that it is their responsibility to keep the University informed of any periods of absence. They must contact their relevant School if they are unable to attend scheduled meetings. Students must inform the appropriate person (Director of Studies) of any planned absence where this is known in advance. Where unforeseen absence occurs, students must provide self-certification as soon as is practicable and, if the absence is for longer than 7 consecutive days, provide supporting evidence of the reason(s) for non-attendance, e.g. medical certificate.
3. Students must be informed that, in certain circumstances, failure to attend the University and engage with the supervisory team will result in withdrawal from their programme of studies.
4. The Innovation and Research Office (IRO) will highlight to all Directors of Studies/Supervisors the need to monitor attendance at scheduled monthly meetings, and to retain evidence of attendance in a student's file. Attendance will be reported back to IRO and the University Research and Knowledge Transfer Board through normal Progression Reports.
5. All Directors of Studies will be advised of the policy and procedures at the start of the year (or start of student) by IRO. They will also be provided with a template sheet for each student to record an agreement over the scheduling of meetings and to project dates forward to provide for at least a monthly meeting by IRO. Directors of Studies will be placed in an email group by IRO and will be emailed every month to confirm that their students (listed) have been in physical contact at least once in the preceding month, and if appropriate give details of the last relevant contact. There will be a place to record attendance issues in the standard progression reports and to attach the actual attendance record if necessary.
6. Supervisors will be expected to advise IRO that they have been in physical contact (i.e. not phone or email which are not geographically specific) in the previous month and record the date of last contact. They will also advise IRO of a failure to attend a scheduled meeting. IRO will be responsible for sending and receiving absence reports but Faculty Managers will have a locus in managing nil-responses from academics. The nil-responses will be monitored at Faculty level.

## 7. Procedure for Dealing with Poor Attendance

When poor attendance has been highlighted, the following 4-stage process should be implemented by individual Schools. In order to assist the individuals responsible for absence monitoring, reports would be made available from Banner, listing all students who have been sent absence letters and their stages within the process.

### 7.1 Stage 1 (Student missing Scheduled Meeting with Director of Studies)

The Director of Studies would arrange for a Stage 1 absence letter to be sent to the student (copied to IRO) asking them to make immediate contact with a named member of staff. IRO would arrange for the sending of Letter 1 to be tracked.

The letter should be sent to the student, marked Private and Confidential (to term time address, to home address and /or via email). The letter should state clearly the reason for writing (for example: the student has missed a scheduled meeting).

It should also state that poor attendance is a matter which is taken very seriously by the School and the University. The relevant UWS Regulations should be clearly identified (the student should already have copies) and the possible eventual outcome of continued poor attendance stated clearly (the student may be assumed to have withdrawn or may be required to withdraw from the programme of study).

There should be a clear explanation of what the student must do to avoid further action being taken against them (improve attendance immediately, get in touch with a named member of staff by a specified date, provide reasons for the absence/s if there are any). There should also be a statement giving encouragement to the student to make contact and assurances that the School will consider sympathetically any problems which the student has experienced which have caused their non-attendance.

Copies of all correspondence should be kept, and the student so informed.

### 7.2 Stage 2

**(Stage 2 should be followed immediately when no contact has been made within 1 week of the Stage 1 letter).**

If there is no response to this first letter and the student has not met with the Director of Studies, the Director of Studies would arrange for a Stage 2 absence letter to be sent to the student (copied to IRO) asking them to make immediate contact. The letter should refer to the first letter/previous stage of the action taken and reiterate all the points made in the first letter. This letter should constitute a formal warning to the student. The letter should state that if the student does not attend (or make contact to arrange a different time)

further action will be taken. IRO would arrange for the sending of Letter 2 to be tracked.

### 7.3 Stage 3

If after a further week the student had still not made contact with the Director of Studies and was still absent, a Stage 3 absence letter would be sent to the student (copied to IRO). IRO would arrange for the sending of Letter 3 to be tracked. This letter should be sent by recorded delivery to both home and term addresses. It should refer to previous action taken and should reiterate the points made in the previous letters. It should invite the student to a meeting with a senior member of staff dealing with poor attendance. It should constitute a final warning and it should make clear that if the student does not attend (or make contact to arrange a different time) then they will be withdrawn from their programme of study.

### 7.4 Stage 4

The Head of School would ensure that a withdrawal form was completed and sent to Student Administration Services who would immediately process the withdrawal, informing all University departments and external bodies, including the UKBA if relevant.

The above list of procedures will be enhanced as appropriate, after consultation, and implementation will be audited on a periodic basis by the University.

### **System to Notify Absence**

Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes, as indicated in their module handbooks, as an acceptable level of participation is required from them if they are to gain credit for the module. Any student who does not satisfy the attendance requirements for a particular module, may be required to withdraw from it or from the programme as a whole. It should be noted that failure to attend a programme could result in non-progression at end of academic year.

The University operates strict guidelines concerning student attendance and further information on this can be found in the University Regulatory Framework (5.7) and the Student Attendance & Engagement policy ([http://www.uws.ac.uk/students/student\\_admin/reggdpl.asp](http://www.uws.ac.uk/students/student_admin/reggdpl.asp)). Student attendance will be monitored at classes throughout the year by lecturers and the Student Guidance Team. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed of any periods of absence.

### **Notification of Absence and Medical Certificates**

It is imperative that students keep the University informed of all absences through sickness. A medical certificate/appropriate covering letter should be sent or handed in to School Office for all absences of eight or more consecutive days. For absences under eight days, a Student Self-Certification Form can be obtained from Student Administration Services, School Office or the website.

**7 Consecutive Days: Complete Student Self-Certification Form**  
**8 Consecutive Days or more: Medical certificate or supporting evidence should be submitted to School Office.**

**Please note that if a student does not report reasons for their absence within a 2 week period, the University's Student Attendance & Engagement policy will be invoked. (Please refer to the Student Administration Services website for further details on the Student Attendance & Engagement Policy and Procedures).**

### **Confidentiality**

Personal or medical evidence submitted by a student when notifying absence to the University will be treated as confidential at all times. Storage will be secure and access restricted strictly to staff directly involved in the handling of the consideration of an individual student's case in relation to attendance and engagement. A copy of all correspondence will be kept by the relevant School Office or in the case of Research Students, Director of Studies.

### **Mitigation Process**

Where a student believes that their absence had adversely affected their performance on an assessment, then they can make a claim which will be

considered by the University's Faculty Mitigation Panel. Mitigation guidance notes are available via the Student Administration Services website. These notes explain the procedures associated with a claim. If a student wishes to make a claim, they must complete a Mitigating Circumstances Form and submit it in time for the Faculty Mitigation Panel. A copy of the student's Self-Certification Form, Medical Certification or supporting evidence should be forwarded to the Panel for consideration.

Please note that the mitigation process does not affect requests such as extensions to assignment deadlines or for other resit opportunities that fall within the normal timeframe of the module (usually one whole trimester). These should continue to be submitted directly to the relevant module co-ordinator or other named person in the relevant Faculty. Other circumstances are detailed in the mitigation form guidance notes. These can be accessed via the University website - (<http://www.uws.ac.uk/students>).

The above list of procedures will be enhanced as appropriate, after consultation, and implementation will be audited on a periodic basis by the University.

Attendance Monitoring WG  
August 2009