Learning and Teaching Support Handbook

Chapter 29 - Taught Student Attendance and Engagement Policy

1.   Principles and Expectations

1.1   Students registered on University of Exeter programmes are required to:

a.   Be in physical attendance during academic terms, unless an alternative mode of study has been approved, and participate in all scheduled synchronous learning and teaching activities required by the module and/or programme. For students studying on wholly online programmes attendance encompasses virtual attendance at synchronous learning and teaching activities (see 1.3 below).

b.   Engage with and participate in all asynchronous learning and teaching activities, guided independent and group study, assessment and feedback, and any other activities required by the module and/or programme.

c.   Attend or undertake examinations, in whatever format required by the University, submit work when required and in the manner specified, including on-line, and otherwise fulfil the academic requirements of their modules and programme.

1.2   The requirements below are recognised by the University of Exeter as important due to the positive impact they can have upon the following:

a.   Ensuring support for students' welfare, health and wellbeing, for example through implementation of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and the <u>Health, Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures</u>.

b.   Enhancing a sense of community and enriching the student experience as a result of participation in collaborative learning, social interaction with staff and fellow students, and support from peers.

c.   Promoting success for all students, regardless of background and/or characteristic.

d.   Improving academic performance/attainment.

e.   Improving graduate employment outcomes.

f.   Heightening student satisfaction in relation to the quality and standard of teaching and learning experiences, academic support, etc.

1.3   'Attendance' encompasses the activity of being present, whether on campus or on-line, at scheduled synchronous learning, teaching and other activities as required by the module and/or programme. This **may** include:

a.   Physical attendance at face-to-face scheduled teaching and/or other learning events as required by the programmes (e.g. lectures, seminars, laboratory sessions, tutorials, fieldtrips and examinations).

b.   Virtual attendance at synchronous teaching and/or other learning events as required by the programmes (e.g. video conferencing of live sessions, synchronous participation in an online forum and on-line examinations).

1.4   'Engagement' encompasses the activity of engaging with, and participating in guided independent or group study activities, assessment and feedback, and any other activities required by the module and/or programme. Such activities **may** include:

a.   Submitting formative and/or summative assessment;

b.   Accessing and/or interacting asynchronously with online learning materials, including viewing recap recordings and completing tasks in virtual learning environments;

c.   Undertaking placements or study abroad; or

d.   Attending meetings with an Academic Tutor (also known as Personal Tutors). Engagement has been defined differently from attendance because not all forms of engagement require students to be present, either physically or virtually, at a particular time and place.

In the context of this policy only activities stipulated as module/programme requirements will be defined as requiring either 'attendance' or 'engagement'.

1.5   Regular and appropriate attendance and engagement is stipulated in the General Regulations for Students and Ordinance 6 of the University of Exeter's Regulations.

1.6   Attendance and engagement requirements should be stipulated in programme specifications, module descriptors, student handbooks and/or other accessible means, clarifying what is expected of students while registered on particular modules/programmes and what the University can be expected to provide in support.

1.7   Attendance and engagement expectations can be adjusted as required on health and wellbeing grounds where supported by Wellbeing and Welfare Services for example by adjusting the balance of on campus and on-line teaching, learning and research activities, which the student is required to attend or otherwise engage with. This may arise as a result of emerging health issues known to the service or be supported by recommendations contained within Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) or as part of the Health, Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures. There may, however, be limitations as to the extent of on-line teaching that will be permissible, including where

modules cannot be studied online due to practical requirements, such as laboratory or field work, or those imposed by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs).

1.8   The University's monitoring of student attendance and engagement, whether on campus or online, and intervention where necessary, will be based on digital records (where available). These will be aligned to the requirements stipulated by modules/programmes and as communicated to students. Where a digital record of required attendance and/or engagement does not exist, alternative manual monitoring processes may be undertaken.

1.9   As a Student Sponsor License holder, the University of Exeter is required to adhere to the Student Sponsor Guidance issued by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). The monitoring process outlined in this policy ensure that the University meets the requirements of the Student Sponsor Guidance with regards to reporting non-attendance and engagement. International students, whether Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught or Professional Doctorates, should follow this link for specific guidance on the requirements for Attendance and Engagement.

1.10   Programmes accredited by professional, statutory or regulatory statutory bodies (PSRBs) may have their own attendance and engagement requirements, which must be met in order to fulfil the standards of their degree. The University of Exeter expects students to meet these requirements where applicable.

1.11   Students who are funded by an employer should ensure they are aware of any attendance and engagement requirements their employer may have which must be met in order to be eligible for funding.

1.12   All students are expected to arrive on time for their scheduled synchronous teaching and learning activities whether delivered on campus or on-line, as required by their module or programme. This is not only to ensure that a student derives the maximum academic benefit from the activity, but also out of respect for, and to avoid disruption to, Module Convenors/Lecturers and other students participating in the activity.

1.13   If a student arrives late to an on campus synchronous activity the Module Convenor/Lecturer may take the following action:

a.   Exclude any student who is more than five minutes late;

b.   Exercise their discretion in relation to admitting the student, based on the level of disruption to the planned teaching and learning activity; or

c.   Reach agreement with students participating in the Module on a mutually acceptable arrangement for managing lateness.

It is recommended that module leaders / lecturers and other individuals responsible for supporting students in their academic pursuit act with compassion and approach the conversation with students in a sensitive manner. The lateness could be due to many reasons such as unforeseen emergencies, need to fulfil the requirements of religious observances (e.g. prayer), medical emergencies etc.

1.14   If a student is late joining online synchronous teaching and learning activity, they should join discretely with their microphone muted in order to avoid to avoid disruption to others.

1.15   In all cases, if a student is late to a teaching and learning activity, it is their responsibility to catch up on any missed teaching and learning through their own independent learning and they should not expect a Module Convenor/Lecturer to repeat that part of the activity.

2.   Monitoring

2.1   Students should seek approval for absence/non-engagement through the Taught Student Absence Procedure or PGR Student Absence Policy (for Professional Doctorates). Normally, absences will be approved for the following reasons:

a.   Disability (in accordance with ILP and HWSS recommendations).

b.   Illness.

c.   Illness of a dependent or other immediate relative for whom they have caring responsibilities.

d.   Self-isolation for Covid-19 in accordance with Government guidance.

e.   Medical appointments.

f.   Bereavement or other compassionate grounds.

g.   Police incident.

h.   Jury service.

i.   Unforeseen emergencies.

j.   Interview/career related appointments.

k.   Approved University visits, courses and exchanges.

l.   To fulfil the requirements of Religious Observance.

2.2   The attendance of students at scheduled learning and teaching activities and engagement with activities required of the programmes/module, whether on-campus or on-line, will be monitored during the academic year. Where data confirms that a student has failed to meet the University of Exeter's expectations on attendance and engagement at the appropriate threshold, automated communications will be sent to students to encourage their attendance and engagement, and to provide guidance on the sources of support that are available to all students at the University of Exeter. The email will also reiterate University of Exeter policy on attendance and engagement.

2.3   Where the defined thresholds are not met, the University may offer appropriate support options. Students may additionally be referred to the Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures or the Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice.

2.4   To ensure that the University of Exeter meets the requirements of the Tier 4/ Student Visa Sponsor Guidance, contact points for Tier 4/ Student Visa students will be monitored. Where a Tier 4/ Student Visa student is absent from eight consecutive contact points a final warning will be issued as per the Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement Code of Good Practice.

2.5   During periods of industrial/professional and/or overseas placements the University of Exeter will continue to expect all students to attend and engage satisfactorily with this element of their programme and complete any required monitoring and contact points specific to the planned off campus activity. Attendance during these periods will be monitored for Tier 4/ Student Visa students and a minimum of ten contact points per year will be required.

3.   Responsibilities

This section sets out the responsibilities of students and staff in relation to attendance and engagement, as well as those of the University:

3.1   Responsibilities of Students.

Students will:

a. Attend or otherwise engage with, all scheduled synchronous learning and teaching activities, whether on-campus or online, and any other activities as required by their modules and/or programme.

b. Engage with all guided independent study, assessment and feedback, and any other activities required of their module and/or programme.

c. Participate in the University of Exeter's attendance monitoring processes.

d. Exhibit the characteristics of professionalism.

e. Notify their discipline if they are unable to fulfil the requirements of their programme (inclusive of attendance at scheduled on-campus learning and teaching activities and engagement in online teaching and learning activities) for sickness or other valid reasons. Further guidance on this can be found in the Taught Student Absence procedure for taught students, the PGR Student Absence Policy for Professional Doctorates and International Student Support Attendance Policy.

f. Engage with the Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures or Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement Code of Good Practice when a referral has been made in light of unsatisfactory levels of attendance and/or engagement.

g. Meet any PSRB attendance and engagement requirements where these are applicable to the programme.

3.2 Responsibilities of Academic Staff.

Pastoral Mentors /Academic Tutors (also known as Personal Tutors) will:

a. Investigate and support students attendance and engagement where data confirms that they have failed to meet the University of Exeter's expectations at the appropriate threshold.

b. Discuss the attendance and engagement of students on a regular basis in 1:1 Pastoral Mentor meetings / Academic tutorial meetings, whether in person or online, throughout the academic year and, where there is felt to be cause for concern, hold informal discussions with the student in the first instance in order to direct them to additional support or guidance.

c. Where appropriate, in the light of module/programme requirements, actively take steps to contact students directly where sessions are missed.

d. Follow and engage with the Academic Personal Tutoring Guidance in order to best support students to attend and engage appropriately.

e. Communicate as appropriate with staff where there are structural problems affecting students being able to attend and/or engagement with programmes/modules.

Module Convenors and Module Tutors will:

a. Support and encourage student participation in attendance monitoring processes during scheduled synchronous learning and teaching activities.

b. Refer students who experience difficulties participating in attendance monitoring processes to support services.

c. Review attendance and engagement data as necessary, taking steps to notify staff and students where expectations are not being met.

Assistant PVCs for Education, Programme Leaders and/or equivalent will:

a. Maintain oversight of attendance and engagement requirements within their programmes/disciplines.

b. Support and encourage academic staff participation in attendance and engagement monitoring processes.

c. Review attendance and engagement data as necessary.

3.3 Responsibilities of Professional Services Staff.

Education and Student Support Staff will:

a. Manage and maintain all relevant processes and systems and support Assistant PVCs for Education, Programme Leaders, Pastoral Mentors / Academic Tutors (also known as Personal Tutors) and Module Convenors (and equivalents of such) to ensure full compliance with the Taught Student Attendance and Engagement Policy.

Education Support Advisors (Welfare) will:

b. Receive referrals from Pastoral Mentors / Academic Tutors (also known as Personal Tutors) /Education Support Teams where there may be welfare concerns and arrange to provide or signpost to any necessary support.

c. Signpost to ILP process where reasonable adjustments related to attendance may be helpful.

d. Initiate the Health, Wellbeing and Support for Study process if appropriate.

3.4 Responsibilities of the University of Exeter.

The University of Exeter will:

a. Be transparent about the attendance and engagement data that we collect and wherever possible, share this data with our students.

b. Provide guidance for our staff and students on how to use, interpret and act on this data.

c.   Use data to improve student support and the services we provide.

d.   Ensure compliance with the monitoring and reporting requirements of external organisations such as the UKVI and PSRBs.

e.   Ensure compliance with the requirements and principles of the Data Protection Act 2018 in relation to the processing of personal attendance data.

4.   Attendance under Exceptional Circumstances

4.1   Should circumstances arise that lead to an academic year being deemed an 'exceptional year', as of result of which normal patterns of on-campus student attendance and engagement across the University are disrupted, then the requirements outlined in this section will come into effect. Circumstances in which an 'exceptional year' may be declared include (but are not limited to):

a.   Natural disaster.

b.   War.

c.   Disease outbreak.

d.   Industrial action.

e.   Widespread/ significant IT failure.

For further information, see the Exceptional Circumstances Handbook.

4.2   In exceptional years, teaching and other learning opportunities may not be provided, or may not be provided in the way initially planned, which may include such activities being wholly online or a blend of on-campus and online delivery. There may even be a need to move between different modes of delivery as circumstances change and in response to regulatory or other requirements and guidance.

4.3   In exceptional years, the University may be required to adapt its expectations and requirements in relation to attendance and engagement, whilst ensuring that the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and the academic student experience are maintained. Such adaptations may include permitting certain students to study remotely for all or part of an academic year.

4.4   Unless a student has been granted permission to study remotely, then the following requirements will apply:

a.   If a synchronous session is mandatory for attendance in person, on campus only, then only those with approval not to attend (including students studying remotely or those

who have submitted a formal notification of their absence) are permitted to be absent; and

b.   If the synchronous session is mandatory for hybrid in-person, on campus / online delivery, then students can only request remote access (such as via Teams or Zoom) if they have a valid reason for which approval has been sought and given.