

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Supplementary to the Degree Regulations.

This document should be read along with the published Degree Regulations.

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1. Scope

- 1.1. Student attendance and engagement is at the heart of the School's function. The current Degree Regulations include reference to expected attendance and this document seeks to expand on this to provide further information about how attendance is managed across the School. It should be read alongside the Student Continuation Policy which describes how various kinds of engagement, including attendance, are used to indicate when intervention may be needed to provide additional support to taught students.
- 1.2. This policy applies to all students on accredited, on campus SOAS programmes: undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, leading to taught degree, research degree and non-degree awards. It does not apply to students enrolled on a programme delivered by Distance or Online Learning or via validation and other partnership arrangements.

2. Why does SOAS monitor attendance?

- 2.1. SOAS is committed to supporting the wellbeing and success of all our students and aims to encourage positive engagement with academic studies and a wide range of other activities. Students who consistently attend classes not only increase their own chances of learning and succeeding in their course of study, but also help to improve the learning experience for other students. By sharing ideas, discussing issues and learning collaboratively, students acquire a range of new skills which increase their ability to learn and prepare them for the world after study.
- 2.2. By monitoring attendance levels, along with other kinds of engagement and participation, we can identify situations where low attendance may be a barrier to a rich learning experience and times where we may need to offer support to our students. Attendance levels and patterns may indicate that a student is going through a difficult time and that we need to reach out to the student and offer support.
- 2.3. SOAS also operates within the regulatory framework for UK Higher Education Institutions and adheres to its requirements. For some external bodies, continued high attendance is a condition of the services or opportunities that are offered. For students receiving student loans, these are typically dependent upon the student continuing to engage with their studies to a satisfactory level. Unsatisfactory attendance can lead to cancellation of student loan provision and the same is true of some other funding sources.
- 2.4. Tier 4 international students are subject to a visa condition which requires them to engage fully with their studies. Visa students are expected to make their studies their main priority whilst in the UK and so must be able to show that they are fully engaged with their programme of study. By monitoring student attendance we are able to identify situations where students may need support to help them continue with their studies or re-engage after some time away. We are also required to report information about visa holders who are not complying with the terms of their visa. Such reporting is never undertaken lightly but still remains a requirement of our licence to sponsor international students to study with us. More detail can be found in Section 5.

3. Taught Degree Students

3.1. What are the attendance requirements?

- 3.1.1. The Taught Degree Regulations currently in effect regarding attendance can be found on the SOAS website ([Taught Degree Regulations](https://www.soas.ac.uk/registry/degreeregulations/)¹). This document expands on the Degree Regulations to provide more information regarding attendance requirements at SOAS.
- 3.1.2. Students are expected to attend classes as required for the modules on which they are enrolled, which may include lectures, tutorials, seminars, language classes, practical classes and other taught sessions as timetabled. Attendance is recorded at one or more of these sessions each week and is recorded only at sessions which are timetabled.
- 3.1.3. We recognize the fact that many students have other commitments alongside their studies. It is our expectation that students will make reasonable effort to arrange any external commitments to fit around their studies. We also acknowledge that, from time-to-time, situations may occur which prevent students from attending classes to the expected level.
- 3.1.4. Where students are unavoidably unable to attend scheduled classes, they can request that the absence is considered as an authorised absence for that class. Students who need to submit a claim for authorised absence should notify their department and provide any evidence they may have to support it.
- 3.1.5. Sometimes absence is unavoidable but the reasons for it cannot easily be evidenced (an example would be minor illnesses which cause short absences but don't require medical attention). Students may self-certify in these cases by contacting their department, so that a record can be made of the reason for non-attendance, which can be taken into account when assessing overall attendance levels and to prevent students being unnecessarily penalised for events beyond their control. When assessing student attendance we will consider these absences so that we can identify whether the patterns or levels of non-attendance raise a concern, and whether additional support should be offered.

3.2. Minimum attendance thresholds

- 3.2.1. Some modules have minimum attendance thresholds for successful completion of the module. These are applied in conjunction with the general attendance regulations and must be met by any student on such a module. The overall expectation is still that a student will attend all required elements of their studies, but students must not fall below the specified minimum attendance criteria. Attendance thresholds may be specified to comply with the requirements of external professional bodies or for other academic reasons.
- 3.2.2. Information regarding specified attendance thresholds for any given module can be found on the relevant module information page of the SOAS website and module convenors are responsible for ensuring that it has been conveyed clearly to students. Where a module does not have a specified minimum attendance threshold, students will still be expected to attend scheduled events as required and may be contacted by departments, or by Registry, if their attendance levels are a cause for concern. This monitoring and communication activity will take place throughout the year.

¹ <https://www.soas.ac.uk/registry/degreeregulations/>

3.3. Language Year Abroad Students

- 3.3.1. Students undertaking a language year abroad as part of their SOAS programme are expected to meet the attendance expectations applicable to students at SOAS. Students on a year abroad will be subject to the regulations of their host institution and so should be subject to whatever monitoring processes are in place at the host institution.
- 3.3.2. A host institution may have a lower required attendance level than SOAS, but students are expected to maintain the academic standards they would demonstrate at home. Students should inform SOAS of any issue which prevents them from attending the host institution for significant periods during their year abroad.
- 3.3.3. SOAS may liaise with host institutions to obtain data about our students during their year abroad in line with existing agreements between institutions and subject to the requirements of the GDPR.

3.4. Intervention

- 3.4.1. As it is in the interest of students to attend and engage fully with their studies, SOAS rarely needs to apply penalties to students based on low attendance. However, provisions are in place to enable appropriate action to be taken in situations where students are not engaging appropriately with their studies. These actions are in place to support students and are implemented to the extent proportionate to the degree of non-attendance. Triggers and methodologies for early intervention are set out in the Student Continuation Policy.
- 3.4.2. Action is taken on a case-by-case basis and each case is assessed on its own merits to determine the level of appropriate action to be taken. As referred to in the degree regulations, where support has been offered and attendance remains low, or where no adequate justification is offered, departments can recommend to the Academic Registrar that a student's module mark be capped at the pass mark (this may impact on the student's final degree classification). Such actions would be pursued only when it is deemed to be an appropriate course of action for the level of non-attendance demonstrated.
- 3.4.3. Where, after supportive intervention, students fail to meet the attendance requirements across multiple modules, academic Departments may recommend to the Academic Registrar that a student's programme registration should be terminated and they be withdrawn from the School. Termination of registration would occur when a student's attendance and subsequent communication (or lack thereof) effectively constitutes a withdrawal. This is equally applicable for Tier 4 visa students who do not engage with their studies or communicate with SOAS, in which case the termination of registration and withdrawal of sponsorship are a statutory requirement for us to carry out in line with the Home Office regulations for student sponsorship.
- 3.4.4. Further information regarding the application of penalties for low attendance can be found in the [Taught Degree Regulations](#)².

4. Postgraduate Research Programmes

4.1. General Requirements

- 4.1.1. There are elements of the attendance policy which cannot be applied to postgraduate researchers as they appear above. PGR engagement monitoring is based on records of supervisory meetings, and researchers and supervisors are expected to maintain a full record

² <https://www.soas.ac.uk/registry/degreeregulations/>

of supervisory contact through the [PhD Manager](#)³ system during all years of study, including periods of fieldwork and writing up.

- 4.1.2. The [PGR Code of Practice](#)⁴ sets out expectations for the frequency of supervisory meetings, which vary according to the mode and stage of study.
- 4.1.3. Where appropriate, alternative arrangements can be put in place for the recording and monitoring of student engagement for students with disabilities or in cases where student/supervisor circumstances make it impossible for face-to-face supervision to take place or for PhD Manager to be used to record it. Requests for such arrangements should be made to the Doctoral School and the relevant supervisor(s).
- 4.1.4. Records of supervisory contact are checked on a regular basis to ascertain when contacts have taken place or have been missed. Where the gaps between contacts are longer than expected without a reason being recorded, this will be followed up with the supervisor and researcher to establish the reason for the missed contact and whether any additional support can be offered. This might involve rearranging supervisions, helping the student to re-engage with their studies or addressing issues of supervisor availability. Students who have missed a contact due to the unavailability of their supervisor will not be considered to have missed the contact and alternative arrangements for recording supervisory contact will be considered.
- 4.1.5. Following these investigations and support, if a postgraduate researcher continues to have gaps between meetings without contact, and no reason is communicated, this could indicate a situation where they have disengaged from their active studies. In this instance, further follow up will be conducted by the School to ascertain the circumstances and whether registration should continue or if withdrawal processes should commence.
- 4.1.6. It is usually expected that contact will be in the form of face-to-face meetings with a supervisor. During fieldwork, email contact or online (e.g. Skype) meetings are permitted forms of interaction for attendance purposes. Where no face-to-face meeting takes place, it is especially important that a clear, up-to-date record is kept on PhD Manager, including details of the work submitted or presented as part of (or in advance of) that meeting.
- 4.1.7. These expectations may be amended by TeLSOC on recommendation from the doctoral research community, amendments to UKVI requirements and other changes of circumstance.

4.2. Fieldwork and other travel

- 4.2.1. Students on approved periods of fieldwork are expected to maintain contact with their supervisor as agreed in advance of their fieldwork and in line with the PGR Code of Practice. Students are expected to return to their studies at SOAS on completion of their fieldwork.
- 4.2.2. Postgraduate researchers travelling overseas are entitled to cover under the SOAS insurance policy where their travel is related to their programme of study and where they have met all of the insurer's requirements for cover (more guidance is available from the Doctoral School). PGR students travelling overseas for purposes not related to their studies are not eligible for cover under the SOAS insurance policy, but are encouraged to discuss their travel plans with their supervisor, especially if there is a chance that the travel will have an impact on their studies. This will allow for supervisory contacts to be rearranged as required.
- 4.2.3. Students travelling overseas for any reason will be able to request a letter from SOAS in support of their travel plans should they wish to do so. SOAS cannot offer supporting letters and may be unable to offer full support should students require it during periods of travel which have not been notified in advance to the supervisor/doctoral school. Students are not

³ <https://doctoralschool.soas.ac.uk/do/soas-auth/login>

⁴ <https://www.soas.ac.uk/registry/degreeregulations/>

obliged to notify SOAS or their supervisor of travel arrangements except planned fieldwork, or where travel plans will lead to a gap between scheduled supervisions.

5. Tier 4 visa holders

- 5.1. SOAS has students and researchers from all over the world and its global community is one of its greatest strengths. SOAS therefore values very highly its ability to sponsor visas for those who need them to study at its London campus. This licence imposes stringent requirements on SOAS. Nevertheless, the attendance monitoring described in this policy applies equally to those who hold Tier 4 visas to study in the UK and those who do not. At all times, SOAS treats attendance monitoring as an opportunity to support its students, including visa-holders, and never to try to catch them out or make them feel unwelcome.
- 5.2. General attendance monitoring is undertaken to inform support systems for all students. It is also important to remember that failure to meet UKVI's specified attendance requirements can result in the application of severe penalties which can include the withdrawal of Tier 4 sponsorship and cancellation of a student's registration on a programme. Situations where the requirements are not met can include, but are not limited to, a failure to attend 10 consecutive scheduled days of teaching or absences of more than 60 days. These rules do not make any distinction between full and part-time Tier 4 students in the maximum period of non-engagement permitted, so part-time postgraduate researchers, who might otherwise find that supervisions in alternate months are sufficient, will still need to ensure that meetings do not occur more than 60 days apart.
- 5.3. Reporting is undertaken only where visa conditions have been clearly breached, and after every attempt has been made by SOAS to support renewed engagement.

| Valid from | Changes | Author and consultation | Approval |
|------------|---|---|--|
| 2017/18 | Policy introduced | Rebecca Harrison (Academic Registrar) in consultation with the Working Group on Academic Regulations; SOAS Students' Union; Doctoral School Management Group and Research Students Association. | Approved by Learning and Teaching Quality Committee 31.05.2017 |
| 2018/19 | Clarification of requirements for PGR students. | Gareth Roberts (Tier 4 Compliance Manager) in consultation with the Working Group on Academic Regulations; SOAS Students' Union; Doctoral School Management Group and Research Students Association. | Approved by Learning and Teaching Quality Committee 03.05.2018 |
| 2019/20 | Amendments in roles and terminology to reflect restructuring and new policy/procedures, and for clarity, especially around (a) the recording of attendance at lectures and (b) PGR supervision. | Revised by Gareth Roberts (Tier 4 Compliance Manager) and Jenni Rhodes (Academic Registrar) in consultation with the Working Group on Academic Regulations; SOAS Students' Union; Doctoral School Management Group and Research Students Association. | Approved by Teaching, Learning and Student Outcomes Committee [date] |