

Student Engagement Policy for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students 2023/24

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Student Engagement Policy and associated processes are part of SOAS's commitment to providing a supportive and engaging learning environment which enables students who have committed to a programme of study to achieve their full potential.
- 1.2 This policy presents the principles and rationale behind the School's approach to monitoring and addressing student engagement patterns. It further outlines the methods and processes whereby the School may seek to understand and inquire where a student's engagement pattern has fallen to a level of concern.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all students on a SOAS credit-bearing programme of study, covering undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, full time and part time delivery. Distance learning and online students are out of scope for the purposes of this policy.
- 2.2 Student Union sabbatical officers are not governed by this policy, and are expected to meet any attendance requirements of their employer, the Students' Union.

3. Principles

- 3.1 SOAS has a commitment to improve student engagement, retention, and attainment through enhancing the relationships and touch points between students and staff.
- 3.2 SOAS recognises the investment that students make when they enrol on a programme of study and recognises that as a responsible institution it has a duty to monitor engagement patterns with a view to improvement.
- 3.3 SOAS recognises that educational outcomes are intrinsically linked to engagement with a programme of study, and in order to support the learning journey and improve student attainment, that mechanisms must exist that review and act on engagement patterns before they significantly impact the overall student experience.
- 3.4 SOAS recognises, as a collaborative institution, that engagement with programmes and fellow students enhances both the individual and collective learning experience.
- 3.5 Students are expected to fully engage with the programme, including meeting the programme specific thresholds for attendance that pertain to their discipline.
- 3.6 While this policy is aimed at all students, SOAS has specific responsibility as a Student sponsor. SOAS is required by UKVI to ensure that all its sponsored students are academically engaging throughout the period of immigration permission for which they have been sponsored. More information can be found on the Home Office's Student Sponsor Guidance.
- 3.7 SOAS recognises that on occasion, unforeseen and unpreventable circumstances may impact a student's ability to engage fully with their programme of study, and that it has a responsibility to respond in an understanding manner to such circumstances and to work to support students to fully re-engage with the programme.
- 3.8 SOAS will continually review engagement patterns and create interventions where necessary to support a student in times of deteriorating engagement. These interventions, whilst seeking to understand the underlying trends and look for improvement, will be supportive in nature and seek to bring students back to expected thresholds of engagement.

4. SOAS Approach

- 4.1 SOAS wishes to encourage and improve student engagement and progression across all programmes, and the process is developed in the spirit of collaborative working with students to identify early, and address, factors that may be impacting an individual's ability to fully engage with the programme of study.
- 4.2 SOAS recognises that a fall in engagement levels may be the result of factors both internal and/or external to the School, and wishes to provide students with appropriate support options during these times.
- 4.3 The process defined below is designed to ensure meaningful communication is maintained with students, and that services that may assist with re-engagement are made available at the earliest opportunity.

5. Attendance Monitoring

- 5.1 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 all timetabled sessions other than lectures, and will be recorded whether the session is held in person or remotely.
- 5.2 Some modules have minimum attendance thresholds for successful completion of the module. These are applied in conjunction with this policy 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. 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.
- 5.3 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 Academic Support team and provide any evidence they may have to support it.
- 5.4 Sometimes absence is unavoidable but the reasons for it cannot easily be evidenced (an example would be minor illnesses do not require medical attention). Students may self-certify in these cases by contacting their Academic Support team, so that a record can be made of the reason for non-attendance, which can be taken into account when assessing overall attendance levels to identify whether the patterns or levels of non-attendance raise a concern, and whether additional support should be offered.

6. Other Measures of Engagement

- 6.1 Student login and engagement data from the BLE platform, otherwise known as Moodle to students, will be utilised. A report will be run every two weeks to capture the engagement levels of students across all levels of study at SOAS.
- 6.2 Engagement in other required activities, such as scheduled meetings with the Academic Adviser, may be taken into account.

7. Language Year Abroad Students

- 7.1 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 will be subject to whatever monitoring processes are in place at the host institution.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 SOAS will liaise with host institutions monthly 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.

8. Authorised absences and dissertation write-up periods for visa students

- 8.1 Sponsor visa students who wish to request an authorised absence (e.g. to travel overseas) during term time must first contact their academic department for approval. The Student Visa Compliance Team must be informed of any absence approval given to sponsored visa students during term time.
- 8.2 Sponsored postgraduate taught (PGT) students are expected to be in the UK for the period of June to September working on their dissertation write-up, unless they have authorised absence or during any official SOAS closures and/or UK Bank holidays. During the dissertation write-up period, PGT students should maintain regular contact with their supervisor/academic team, engagement with learning platforms and resources via SOAS, and engagement with the campus.

9. Process

Stage 1

- 9.1 After three recorded consecutive absences, an automated email will be sent to a student noting the absence and encouraging them to re-engage and/or contact their department.

Stage 2

- 9.2 Every two weeks during term-time, the Student Experience, Engagement & Retention (SEER) team will run reports to identify students who have:
 - a) Four or more unauthorised absences from scheduled teaching sessions in the preceding four-week period, and/or
 - b) engaged with the BLE fewer than four times in the preceding four-week period, and/or
 - c) not submitted an assessment on time (subject to any permitted extended deadlines or extensions via mitigating circumstances)
- 9.3 Students identified as meeting one or more criteria will be emailed by their department team and invited to meet with their Academic Adviser within one week of the email to discuss their engagement.
- 9.4 Where a student engages to the satisfaction of the Academic Adviser, the concern will be recorded as resolved. If the student is then shown not to have re-engaged in the subsequent four-week period, they will be progressed directly to stage 3.

Stage 3

- 9.5 Where the student fails to meet with the Academic Adviser, or the student has not adequately re-engaged with their studies, a Fitness to Study Panel will be held. The Fitness to Study meeting should take place within two weeks of notification from the Academic Advisor, department or SEER that the student has failed to attend the meeting or failed to re-engage as set out in stage 2.
- 9.6 This Panel will be chaired by the Academic Registrar (or nominee) and includes the Head of Department and the Head of Student Advice and Wellbeing, or their nominees. The Student Visa Compliance Manager will attend if the student is sponsored under Tier 4/Student Route.
- 9.7 The Fitness to Study Panel will make decisions in line with the Fitness to Study Policy, which include:
- a) Voluntary leave of absence agreed with student.
 - b) Mandatory leave of absence with return to study at an agreed date.
 - c) Voluntary withdrawal from studies agreed with student.
 - d) Mandatory withdrawal of student.
 - e) Further reasonable adjustments or support.
 - f) Conditions for continued study or return to study at a later date.
 - g) Suspension of Regulations.
- 9.8 If a Fitness to Study Panel allows a student to continue studying with support and/or conditions in place, and the student fails to meet those conditions, or is identified as not engaged in a subsequent four-week period of the same academic year, they will be referred directly to a further Fitness to Study Panel
- 9.9 A student is entitled to appeal against the outcome of a Fitness to Study Panel under the Student Academic Appeals Procedure

Document Version

Valid from	Author	Changes	Published
2021/22	Susan Cambell, Interim Academic Registrar	-	July 2021
2023/24	Kirsten Johnson, Head of Student Experience, Engagement & Retention	Updated process stages, including the addition of lack of assessment submission as a criteria for lack of engagement. Added references to amendments to the Fitness to Study Policy.	June 2023