Student Engagement Policy for Taught Students

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Note: All policies must be read in conjunction with all other SOAS policy, procedure and guidance documents. Printed copies of policies may not be the most up to date, therefore please refer to the policy pages on the SOAS external website or intranet for the latest version.

Student Engagement Interventions Flowchart
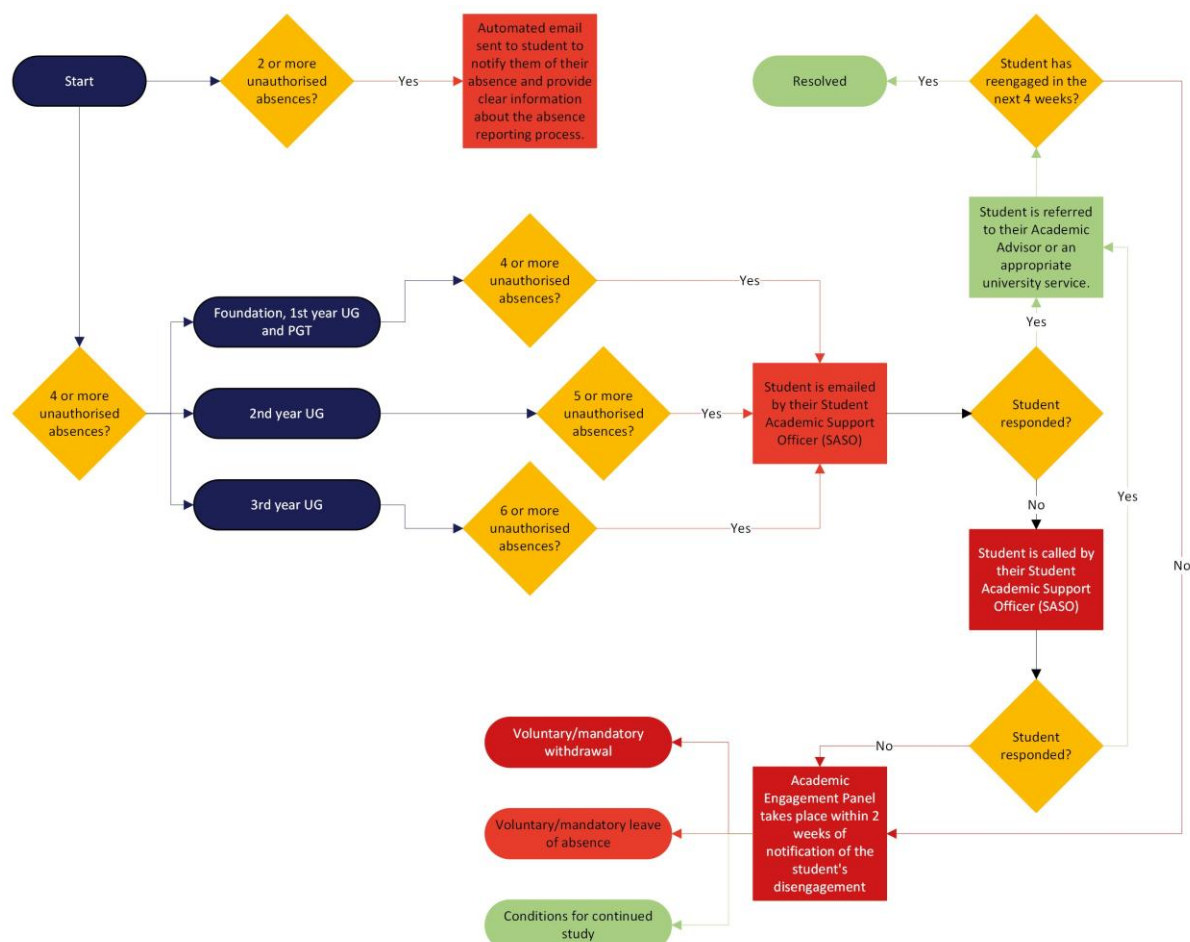
1.   Introduction

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 SOAS's approach to monitoring and addressing student engagement patterns. It further outlines the methods and processes whereby the SOAS may seek to understand and inquire where a student's engagement pattern has fallen to a level of concern.

1.3.   The primary aim of this policy is to support students in fully engaging with their academic programme by identifying potential barriers at an early stage and providing appropriate support to help them overcome these challenges. This, in turn, enhances their chances of academic success. Students are strongly encouraged to read this policy carefully to ensure they meet engagement and attendance requirements, thereby avoiding the risk of withdrawal.

1.4.   SOAS can only disburse government maintenance loans, grants, bursaries, scholarships, and other forms of financial support if student's attendance and engagement are satisfactory. It is each student's responsibility to maintain regular attendance and active engagement to meet the learning objectives of their course of study and individual modules.

2.   Scope

2.1.   This policy applies to all students on a SOAS credit-bearing programme of study, covering foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate taught students. This policy does not apply to online and distance learning students.

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 ensuring all students engage fully with their studies and can access appropriate support when needed.

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.   Attendance Monitoring

4.1.   Students are expected to attend all their classes, which may include lectures, tutorials, seminars, language classes, practical classes and other taught sessions as timetabled.

4.2.   Attendance is recorded in a variety of ways at all timetabled sessions and will be recorded whether the session is held in person or remotely. Any attendance information for timetabled sessions is used as part of this engagement policy.

5.   Notifying Sickness & Authorised Absence

5.1.   Students on all taught courses must keep the University informed of any sickness or other absence from classes by emailing their Academic Support team and the relevant module teacher of the class they are unable to attend.

5.2.   Absences of between 1-5 consecutive working days:

5.2.1.   Home students will be able to authorise their absence for up to 5 working days by contacting their Academic Support team, so that a record can be made of the reason for non-attendance (an example would be a minor illness that does not require medical attention).

5.2.2.   Visa sponsored students will be able to authorise their absence for up to 5 working days, unless they are leaving the country.

5.3.   Absences of between 6-15 consecutive days, excluding Reading Weeks and holiday periods:

5.3.1.   Students who are planning to miss between 6-15 consecutive working days of classes, or any other timetabled events must request approval from their academic department in advance. Authorised absence requests for up to 15 consecutive days cannot be approved retrospectively. Such requests will require supporting evidence.

5.3.2.   Students should discuss their absence and any impact on their academic progress with their academic advisor.

5.3.3.   Sponsored visa students who wish to request an authorised absence (e.g. to travel overseas) during teaching 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 teaching time.

5.3.4.   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.

6.   Other Measures of Engagement

6.1.   In addition to on campus attendance, other measures of engagement will be utilised, such as (but not limited to):

- Student login and engagement data from the BLE platform (Moodle).
- Engagement in other required activities, such as scheduled meetings with the Academic Adviser.
- On-time assessment completion and grades.
- Applications for self-certification and/or mitigating circumstances.

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.   Process

8.1.   Automated Email

After two or more recorded consecutive unauthorised absences, an automated email will be sent to a student notifying them of their absence and providing clear information about the absence reporting process.

8.2.   Departmental Contact

8.2.1.   Every 28 days during teaching-time, the Student Experience team will run reports to identify:

a) Foundation year, first year undergraduate, and postgraduate taught students who have recorded four or more unauthorised absences in the preceding four-week period.

b) Second year undergraduate students who have recorded five or more unauthorised absences in the preceding four-week period.

c) Third year undergraduate students who have recorded six or more unauthorised absences in the preceding four-week period.

8.2.2. Students identified at this stage will be emailed by their Student Academic Support Officer (SASO) and must respond within a week of receiving the email. If the student does not respond within a week, their department will make further contact.

8.2.3. At this stage, students may be directed to an appropriate university service. If a student engages to their department's satisfaction, the concern will be marked as resolved.

8.2.4. If the student does not re-engage within the following four weeks, or if the department is unable to obtain a response from them by email or phone, they will be progressed directly to the Academic Engagement Panel.

8.3. Academic Engagement Panel

8.3.1. If the student fails to respond, or has not adequately reengaged with their studies, an Academic Engagement Panel will be held. The Academic Engagement Panel should take place within two weeks of notification from the Academic Adviser, department, or Student Experience regarding the student's disengagement.

8.3.2. The Panel will be chaired by an appropriate member of academic staff, with notes recorded by a member of the Student Experience team. If the student holds a Tier 4/Student Route visa, a Student Visa Compliance representative will be present.

8.3.3. During the panel all available information in relation to the student's engagement will be considered. Based on the evidence presented, the Panel may lead to one of the following outcomes:

a) Voluntary leave of absence agreed with the 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 from studies.
e) Conditions for continued study.

8.3.4. The student must attend the Academic Engagement Panel. If the student does not attend, the meeting will proceed in their absence and may result in withdrawal from their studies.

8.3.5. If the Panel permits a student to continue studying with conditions, and the student either fails to meet those conditions or is found to be disengaged in a subsequent four-week period within the same academic year, a further Academic Engagement Panel will be convened. The decision of this Panel will be final.

8.3.6. Students have the right to appeal the outcome of the Academic Engagement Panel under the Student Academic Appeals Procedure.