Student Attendance & Engagement Policy (Taught and Research Students)

Prepared by	Registry
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V1.0	16.03.20.13	Registry	First Published Version
V1.1	01.02.2014	Registry	9c added – Clarification re Tier4 points of contact added.
V1.2	01.09.2017	Registry	Updated Dept and Post Titles
V1.3	01.12.2021	Registry	Updated Dept titles and UKVI visa types.
V1.4	26.01.2022	Quality Assurance & Enhancement	Addendum update to reflect on-going monitoring adaptations, in light of the continuing COVID-19 public health impact.
V1.5	28.06.23	Quality Assurance & Enhancement	Restructured to bring all student facing points together. Re-worded to reflect the 80% threshold for student alerts and 30% threshold for review.
V2	29.08.24	Academic Registrar	Revised to combine previously separate policies for taught and research students, to; remove duplication, provide greater clarity for programmes which have a mix of taught and research elements, enhance clarity with respect to expectations of student attendance.

GCU Student Attendance and Engagement Policy

1. Introduction

This policy has been developed as part of the University's overall Student Attendance & Engagement Strategy which aims to provide a supportive learning environment in which student attendance is one aspect of overall engagement. GCU is committed to providing a student experience of the highest possible quality. GCU monitors the attendance of students at timetabled teaching sessions and engagement with Research Supervisors to facilitate early identification of students at risk and allow timely interventions in terms of academic and personal support while complying with the requirements of external agencies, such as the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and the Student Award Agency for Scotland (SAAS). The University is also required to report absences to employers, Professional Statutory Bodies, or other sponsors where they are funding/co-funding course fees.

2. Scope

This policy covers all students at GCU studying for either a Taught or Research Degree whether studying Full Time or Part Time, including apprenticeships and other work based learning programmes. Programmes with specific requirements will have these clearly outlined within their Programme Handbook.

3. Key Principles

a) Students are active participants in their learning experiences and must take responsibility for achieving their potential through successful completion of each stage of their studies.
b) Monitoring attendance can provide an indication of student commitment, motivation and any difficulties which need to be addressed.
c) Regular attendance and academic achievement are closely linked. Students who attend timetabled classes and regular research/dissertation/project student-supervisor meetings and participate in personal, professional development are more likely to enjoy a rewarding experience in which core skills and abilities, such as team-working, are developed.
d) Schools will ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to both identify students considered to be at risk and offer appropriate support and guidance.
e) The University has a dual duty of care for UKVI Student Route sponsored students in terms of providing appropriate support to international/EU students studying here in the UK and meeting our UKVI sponsor licence requirements.

4. Supporting Students

The University appreciates that difficulties in meeting attendance requirements can occur and will make reasonable adjustments for students in protected groups and with disabilities in line with the Equality Act 2010. GCU is intent on making an appropriate response to all students by making adjustments, and providing support mechanisms including referrals to Student Services, which take account of individual circumstances and evidence provided. Students should contact their

Programme Leader/Year Tutor/Director of Studies if they anticipate any difficulty in meeting the expectations outlined in this policy.

5. Expectations of All Students

a) All students are expected to check their GCU email account on a regular basis for any formal notifications/communications and to respond to requests for information relating to any absence and attend any meeting requested by the University to discuss ongoing concerns regarding attendance.

b) Students are expected to attend all necessary formal examinations/assessments and submit coursework by published submission dates. Students who fail to attend an extended formal exam or submit a piece of assessment (where no approved extension has been granted), will be marked as a non-submission, unless a valid declaration of not being Fit to Sit/Submit has been made.

c) For programmes, such as Professional Doctorates, which contain a mix of taught modules and research thesis/project, students will follow the process for taught programmes (section 7) for elements which have timetabled classes and the process for Research Students (section 8) when they progress to the second stage and commence their research thesis/project. Details will be provided within the relevant Programme Handbooks.

d) Where programmes are subject to PSRB or other requirements (i.e. graduate apprenticeships) with regards attendance levels, these will be clearly outlined to students at the start of each academic year, with necessary reporting and reviews undertaken by relevant programme teams.

6. International Students Studying in the UK with a UKVI Sponsored Visa

a) Such students must attend two Visa checkpoint events per academic year (normally held in Oct/Nov and Feb/March) where they will be required to present their current passport and visa documentation for checking. Failure to attend either of these checkpoints with no satisfactory reason will result in the student being withdrawn from their programme of study and reported to UKVI which will result in UKVI curtailing their visa.

b) When considering an application for a CAS extension, or a CAS in cases where international students with a non- UKVI Student Sponsored visa wishes to switch to UKVI Student sponsored visa, a student's attendance record will be considered when a decision is made about whether a CAS will be issued or not.

c) For Clarity, GCU considers a "UKVI Student Sponsored Student Point of Contact" to be a week when a student is expected to be in contact with the University. However, the requirements of this attendance policy supersede the UKVI contact point requirements.

d) Where a student is unable to complete re-registration due to outstanding debt, they will be suspended, and sponsorship withdrawn under their UKVI Student Route visa which will result in the UKVI curtailing their visa and therefore in such circumstances a student must make immediate arrangements to leave the UK and return home.

e) Where a student is withdrawn due to lack of attendance, the VISA Team will inform the student that due to the lack of attendance and engagement the University has withdrawn their visa sponsorship and informed UKVI of this withdrawal, therefore they must make arrangements to

return to their home country as UKVI will curtail their visa. Students can be signposted to the VISA Team for support and further advice.

f) Where a student is likely to be absent for an extended period of time, even with permission from their Programme Team, they should seek guidance from the VISA team as to any potential impact on their visa sponsorship.

g) For students undertaking the role of GCUSA sabbatical officer (FTO) on a Student Visa sponsored by GCU, attendance and engagement is monitored by GCUSA. GCU's VISA Team will carry out relevant reporting to UKVI and assist FTOs with relevant visa advice.

7. Students Studying on a Taught Programme of Study (UG or TPG)

7.1. Student Expectations and Responsibilities

a) Students are expected to attend all timetabled lectures, classes, seminars and tutorials whether on campus or online. Student engagement in class activities is an important part of the learning experience and is required to ensure students attain the best possible academic outcome.

b) The University expects that students will engage fully and proactively with the learning and teaching activities within their programme of study. Programmes accredited by professional bodies will align with their regulatory requirements. On some modules, compulsory attendance requirements apply, module handbooks will clearly indicate where this is the case.

c) Where compulsory attendance/engagement is specified in module handbooks, students must attend seminars/tutorials/lab session or other activities designated compulsory in the module documentation, since attendance and/or engagement is fundamental and essential to meeting the learning outcomes of the module. Formal timetabled exams are always compulsory.

d) Advising of any circumstance which will likely result in them being unable to attend any timetabled class for more than one week (Mon to Sun) of timetabled days by entering details into the online system.

e) Students who undertake a placement as part of their programme are responsible for ensuring that their attendance matches the requirements of the placement provider. Placement providers will inform the University if a student is failing to maintain a good attendance record, which may lead to the student being withdrawn from the placement activity and potentially from their programme of study.

f) Students who are undertaking a Dissertation/Project as part of the final level of their studies are expected to meet in person regularly with their supervisor. The supervisor will be responsible for noting academic progress and escalating any issues around lack of engagement/progress to the relevant Programme Leader.

7.2. Action to be taken when attendance falls below expected levels

a) Where a student, without approval, has zero attendance at timetabled classes over a period of time (1 week then 2 consecutive week), they will receive communications reminding them of the importance of attending classes and signposting to University support services. Students will also be warned of the consequences of continued lack of attendance which may lead to their withdrawal and ask that they contact their programme team if their absence is likely to continue.

b) Where a student continues with zero attendance at timetabled classes over a 21 days period (3 weeks of teaching) with no satisfactory approved absence recorded, the student will receive a

communication informing them that due to their continued unauthorised absence, they are being withdrawn, with action undertaken in line with the related standard operating procedure.

c)   In addition, for students who are attending timetabled classes, but fail to attend an expected level, the University will reach out to students, reminding them of the importance of attending all timetabled classes and signposting to University Support Services.

8.   Students Studying for a Research Degree

8.1.   Student Expectations and Responsibilities

a)   Meeting the various general deadlines set out in the regulations for the award of the University's degrees of Master of Philosophy, Doctor of Philosophy and Professional Doctorate, and any specific deadlines set by the Director of Studies.

b)   Devoting on average at least 35 hours per week if full-time or 12 to 21 hours per week if part-time to their research studies throughout the year when not on authorised holiday or absence.

c)   Meeting/communicating regularly with their Director of Studies, once a week (full-time) or every two weeks (part-time) for the first three months and then thereafter monthly (full-time) or bi-monthly (part-time) for the remainder of the years of study. The meeting/ communication should be held face to face (in person) with limited exception (such as when the student is studying in a distance learning mode or is on a planned study research trip). Student Route visa holders are required to meet face to face at least monthly unless they have an authorised Request To Leave (RTL) for studies outside the UK (e.g. research fieldwork) or, in the absence of their Director of Studies, their 2nd supervisor. An occasional online monthly meeting (up to 2 in any given 12 month period) is acceptable, if this avoids a monthly meeting not being able to take place.

d)   In person attendance of meetings aims to aid student retention and progression as well as meet UKVI requirements for Student Route visa holders. Where required, Directors of Studies/ Supervisors should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to enable in person attendance of meetings with their students; this will be down to the individual considerations on a case-by-case basis.

e)   Ensuring that an accurate log is maintained of meetings/communications with their Director of Studies/ supervisors and writing a note of key points/ actions to be shared, agreed and approved by their Director of Studies.

f)   Attending taught courses, personal and professional development activities as agreed with their supervisors through their personal development planning and ensuring they have their attendance recorded.

g)   For full-time students, gaining authorisation on their University Holiday and Absence record as necessary

h)   Notifying their Director of Studies and School Programme Co-ordinator (Research Degrees) in respect of any unplanned or unforeseen absences.

i)   For absences lasting more than 7 days, submit a medical certificate along with their holiday and absence record approved by their Director of Studies (for full-time students) to the School's Programme Co-ordinator (Research Degrees).

8.2.   Annual leave

Full-time postgraduate research students are entitled to 35 days holiday and 11 public holidays per year (1st October to the following 30th September). Part-time research students and stage 2

Professional Doctorate students are entitled to their holidays as given by their terms of employment outside the university. Annual leave must be approved by the Director of Studies prior to annual leave commencing using the holiday/absence reporting form. Part-time students and stage 2 Professional Doctorate students should notify their Director of Studies of any annual leave that may impact on the normal progress of their studies.

8.3. Research Fieldwork and Placement Activities

a) Students who undertake research fieldwork or a placement as part of their studies are responsible for ensuring that their attendance matches the requirements of the fieldwork/placement provider. Fieldwork or placement providers will inform the University if a student is failing to maintain a good attendance record, which may lead to the student being withdrawn from the fieldwork/placement activity and potentially from their programme of study.

b) Students with Student Route visa attending a placement need to provide details via the Placement Reporting process on a monthly basis. The VISA team, who have access to this information, are then required to report details to UKVI.

c) Extended research fieldwork beyond 60 days requires approval by VISA with an RTL form and weekly plan of activity provided for compliance assessment. Engagement with the university should continue during these approved periods.

8.4. Director of Studies

Director of Studies play a pivotal role in the oversight and support of research students and as such have specific responsibilities in relation to their assigned students with regards engagement and attendance, including:

a) Meeting and engaging regularity with their students as outlined in section 8 above, giving the student advance warning if they intend to be away from the University for any length of time and making the necessary arrangements for meetings at a distance during that period or arrange with the 2nd supervisor to arrange the monthly/bi-monthly meetings with the student.

b) Review attendance/absence data regularly, communicating with students deemed 'at risk', sign posting them to relevant support services, as well as undertaking actions as outlined in 8.5 when a student has failed to engage as expected, ensuring the PGRT and Programme Coordinator are informed of concerns in a timely manner as necessary.

c) Approving requests for annual leave and Request to leave (RTL) as necessary, ensuring advice is gained from VISA for international students wishing to leave the UK for activities directly related to their studies.

8.5. Action to be taken due to Unsatisfactory Student Attendance or Unexplained Absence/s

a) Where a student has failed to attend an arranged student-supervisor meeting, the meeting should be re-arranged as quickly as possible and an explanation for the unexpected absence sought by the supervisor and stated on the meeting record.

b) If repeated efforts to contact and re-arrange the meeting are unsuccessful for a period of more than 10 working days, the Director of Studies should notify this unexplained absence to the Senior Postgraduate Research Tutor (SPGRT), Associate Dean Research (ADR) and the School Programme Co-ordinator (Research Degrees).

c) The Senior Postgraduate Research Tutor will contact the student (via email) asking for an explanation for the absence. If no response is received within 5 working days, the School will send a formal communication to the student (via email) inviting the student to attend a meeting to discuss their absence with the SPGRT or ADR.

d) If no response to the communication in item C above is received, the School will send a formal communication (via email and letter to the term time address) requesting that they contact the School within 5 working days and provide their School with the reason (including medical certification if appropriate) for their absence. This communication will inform the student that if they do not respond, they will be withdrawn from their programme of studies and relevant external stakeholders informed.

e) If no response to communication in D. is received within 5 working days, then the School will complete the student withdrawal process (approval of withdrawal by RPAB Chair's action) and update Registry.

f) Registry will then write formally to the student (via email and letter to term time address) informing them that due to their continued/repeated absence and lack of engagement with the university, the student has been withdrawn from their programme of studies.

9. Student Fraud

a) Students who are identified as having fraudulently recorded their attendances will be subject to the University's student discipline procedure. Any instance of fraud recorded will be taken into account when considering such matters such as CAS extension requests or where the consideration of a student's overall level of attendance & engagement is taken into account with respect to any decision by a Progression & Awards Board.

b) Class lecturers are expected to undertake regular audits and report any discrepancies identified (as per the relevant Standard Operating Procedure).