

Student Engagement Policy 2021/22

Non-degree programmes

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 programme of study below degree level (including IFCELS, Foundation Year, English Language).

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 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.

3.7 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 all classes 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, and will be recorded whether the session is held in person or remotely.

5.2 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.

5.3 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. Process

Stage 1

6.1 Attendance will be recorded in all classes, on campus and online, and where a student's attendance falls below 90% in a 4-week period, they will be invited to meet with their Programme Convenor within one week to discuss their engagement.

6.2 Where a student engages to the satisfaction of the Programme Convenor, the concern will be recorded as resolved and the reason for the student's absence recorded.

Stage 2

6.3 Where a student's attendance falls below 90% in a second 4-week period, or where at Stage 1 the Programme Convenor is not satisfied that the student will adequately re-engage with their studies, the student will be required to meet with the Head of Department to agree a plan to re-engage with their studies. The Student Visa Compliance Manager will attend if the student is sponsored under Tier 4/Student Route.

Stage 3

6.4 Where a student's attendance falls below 90% in a third 4-week period, a Fitness to Study Panel will be held. This Panel will include the Head of Department, the Head of Student Advice and Wellbeing and the Academic Registrar, or their nominees. The Student Visa Compliance Manager will attend if the student is sponsored under Tier 4/Student Route.

6.5 The Fitness to Study Panel may decide to allow the student to continue their studies with support and conditions in place; to require the student to take a leave of absence and return to study at an agreed date with support and conditions in place; or require the student to withdraw from study. If, however, the student is sponsored under Tier 4/Student Route, and attendance has fallen below 70% in 3 consecutive 4-week periods, then the Panel must require the student to withdraw unless there are exceptional and evidenced reasons for absence.

6.6 If a Fitness to Study Panel allows a student to continue with support and conditions in place, and the student fails to meet those conditions, or is identified as not engaged in subsequent four week period of the same academic year, they will be referred directly to a further Fitness to Study Panel.

6.7 A student is entitled to appeal against the outcome of a Fitness to Study Panel under the Student Academic Appeals Procedure.