



PGRS ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT & ATTENDANCE POLICY

(2024/2025)

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Summary of policy

The Open University is committed to helping Postgraduate Research Students (“students”) achieve their study goals and we recognise that students who engage actively and fulfil attendance requirements are more successful in their studies and in the attainment of their research degree. The Open University is also committed to promoting student wellbeing, recognising the importance of mutually supportive research communities. The Open University aims to provide personalised support and mutually agreed solutions tailored to individual needs and circumstances to enable students to participate fully in their academic progress.

This policy is intended to enable timely support for students if their attendance and/or engagement pattern suggests that they may need extra help to engage with their studies.

The policy also ensures that whether students are Home or International students and whether they are studying full-time (FT) or part-time (PT), they are treated fairly and consistently. This policy is designed to complement regular supervisory meetings and the Progress Monitoring Review process that takes place enabling the University to provide and focussed support if it is needed.

Scope

Who and which circumstances this policy covers

This document applies to students registered with The Open University, including those based at partner institutions, and covers both part-time (PT) and full-time (FT) studies. Students and their supervisors are therefore required to understand and comply with this policy.

Related Documentation

Please refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this policy document:

- The [Research Degree Regulations](#)
- [Student Route Visa holder responsibilities](#)

The Open University Student Charter Values

This policy aligns with the following Open University Student Charter Values:

We value diversity and challenge inequalities and we are stronger for doing so.

We communicate with each other in ways which are clear, relevant, accurate and timely.

As students, we share the responsibility for learning and make a commitment to study and research using the resources and support services available, upholding the highest standards of academic integrity.

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As staff, we each play our role in enabling high quality learning and advancing knowledge and understanding through research and scholarly activity, ensuring every student is supported.

We work to maintain and enhance the standards and reputation of our University recognising the contributions that all members make to its success.

Introduction

This policy can be used to help understand and manage any situation where the academic engagement and attendance of a student is having a negative impact on their academic progress.

This policy is designed to complement the required regular supervisory meetings, the Progress Monitoring Review process that takes place annually by providing a more focussed and more frequent check on students well-being and their engagement with their studies. It will enable The Open University to provide students with timely and focussed advice and support if they need help.

For specific guidance on how this policy may relate to a student's personal circumstances, please contact the Research Degrees Team (Research-Degrees-Management) who are specially trained to advise on the implementation of policies.

Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at The Open University

Policies are inclusive of all Open University Students, Learners, Enquirers and Alumni, regardless of age, civil status, dependency or caring status, care experience, disability, family status, gender, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnerships, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic background, sex, sexual orientation or trades union membership status.

Safe Space Reporting

The University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in which everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across our University will not be tolerated. Safe Space Reporting is available through [an online tool](#) through which staff, students, learners and visitors are encouraged to report incidents of assault, bullying, harassment, hate crime, or sexual harassment. It also provides information about what you can do if these incidents happen to you, or to someone you know, and where you can find support.

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Policy

1. Purpose

This policy provides a framework for recognising where academic engagement and/or attendance is detrimental to a student's progress or well-being, and the measures to take to help the student get back on track.

1.1. The objectives of this policy are:

- To ensure that academic engagement and attendance (AE&A) of every student is sufficient in order to ensure success in their studies.
 - To enable the close monitoring of student progress and well-being.
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2. Policy principles

2.1 Academic Engagement

Academic engagement (AE) is the active participation of a student during their PGR studies and the minimum expected engagement and attendance requirements are stated in the Research Degree Regulations. Attendance is the requirement for all students to attend study activities as required by their programme and their mode of study – either at a full-time or part-time rate of study.

The following is a guide to activities that commonly apply within the context of a student's academic engagement, noting that this list is not exhaustive.

- Attending supervisory meetings and engaging with supervisor feedback
- Attending required lectures, workshops, training events or seminars.
- Attending conferences
- Undertaking required laboratory work.
- Undertaking research or fieldwork.
- Completing upgrade, thesis submission and attending the viva voce examination
- Engaging with a skills audit
- Engaging with annual progress monitoring
- Engaging with the wider student and university research community
- Timely submission of draft and final assessments, where relevant
- Fieldwork as required (including data collection in a particular geographic area; an archive or library, for example)

Activities that require attendance in-person, normally on campus, include:

- Registration and re-registration
- Induction
- Supervisory meetings (for full time students)
- Technical training sessions (e.g., using laboratory equipment)

The requirement to be on-campus is negotiable, noting that starred items require attendance in person unless there are exceptional circumstances preventing this (e.g., a student cannot attend an in-person supervisory meeting because they are engaged in fieldwork in a remote location).

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2.2 What we expect of our PGRS

As per the Research Degree Regulations the University expects full-time students to be available on campus to undertake their research, attend related training or other relevant events and meet supervisors and other members of their academic unit on a regular basis. They are expected to live within easy daily commutable distance of the campus or Affiliated Research Centre. Please note that it is recommended that full-time students attend campus or another site of research a minimum of two days/15 hours per week to engage in in-person activities.

The expectation is that AE&A should not normally be compromised by any personal, social, work, residential or other arrangements, but the University understands that often circumstances can arise that are entirely unavoidable. We ask that students inform their supervisors of any concerns or issues that they are having that might impact upon their studies so adjustments can be made. Students with a declared disability or with caring responsibilities can expect that reasonable adjustments will be put in place to accommodate their needs in fulfilling their AE&A obligations

Where such personal circumstances are harming progress students and their supervisors should utilise the Study Break process. Students and supervisors should ensure that they understand the Attendance and AE&A requirements, as set out in this policy, and the Research Degree Regulations. Students are expected to attend activities or events in full, except where Exceptional Circumstances prevent the completion of an activity.

2.3 Study away

If a student is away from their regular place of study whilst carrying out activities that are an agreed part of their research, contact should be maintained with The Open University through an agreed schedule of contact with a supervisor. This is to ensure the well-being of the student working away.

All Professional Doctorate students (EdD and DHSC) are part-time and studying away from The Open University campus. Their contact with their studies must be maintained via weekly engagement with the programmed resources, attendance to online seminars and in person at the annual residential weekends.

2.4 Authorised and unauthorised absence

Authorised absences for students include:

- Holiday entitlement
- Maternity, paternity shared or adoption leave
- Study breaks
- Up to 7 consecutive days of sickness absence that does not need medical certification

Any absences that are not authorised will be of concern. Supervisors should discuss with their students in the first instance but alert Faculty leads (DRD/DAD/PGT) so that there is a wider awareness. Appropriate colleagues can then work with the students and supervisors in supporting the students back to engagement with their studies

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2.5 Minimum levels of Academic Engagement

10 supervisory meetings per year, no more than 60 days apart, if a student is full-time; or 5 supervisory meetings per year if a student is part-time. Supervisory meetings may involve one or more supervisors, although the expectation is that all internal supervisors attend the majority of meetings.

- Students should normally respond to supervisors and University contact within 3 working days unless on an authorised absence as outlined above.
- Student carries out their research activities, as agreed with their supervisory team, and responds to supervisor feedback.
- Student attends activities agreed with their supervisors as part of study (laboratory training and analytical work, fieldwork, seminars, conferences, workshops, training, or residential events).
- Student engages with progress reporting, upgrade activities, thesis preparation/submission and examination.
- Student submits formative and summative draft/final assessments on time.

For full time students an engagement of a minimum of 12 academic activities on campus is expected. This should include the 10 supervisory meetings, as noted above, and at least a further two other on campus academic related activities.

Procedure

3. Implementation

The Research Degrees Committee has oversight of policy and quality and requires AE&A to be monitored and uploaded to PGR Manager. Faculties will monitor AE&A primarily through feedback on any concerns derived from supervisory meetings. If there are concerns over a student's AE&A the supervisors can call on the Faculty/School Research Degrees lead (Director of Research Degrees, Postgraduate Tutor or Convenor, or equivalent) for support in establishing how to help their student towards an improved AE&A. students should be directed to their Third-Party Monitor and other support services such as the Employer Assistance Programme, where applicable. Support will be tailored to the individual needs of each student.

As this policy is focussed on early warning and support for student, it is expected that the monitoring of Academic Engagement and Attendance takes place with a greater frequency than the Progress Monitoring. In order to provide timely support for any students who are experiencing difficulties. It is recommended that a 'health check' of a Faculty's student community occurs every 6 to 8 weeks for full-time and 12-16 weeks for part-time students. The information should be provided by supervisors (based on their supervisory meetings with their students) and collated centrally in the Faculty.

3.1 Reporting AE&A to the Faculty

There are a number of questions that supervisor/s may wish to bear in mind when reporting AE&A to the Faculty/School as follows noting that not all of them/any of them may be relevant at the time of reporting:

- Has there been a number of/period of consecutive unauthorised absences?

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- Have there been a number of sporadic unauthorised absences – how many are there – what is their frequency/timing?
- Is any non-attendance coupled with late submission/non-submission of any materials?
- Is my student failing to respond to emails requests and/or failing to respond to request for meetings?
- When did I last engage with my student?
- Is the lack of engagement impacting on progress?
- Where non-AE&A is recorded persistently, and where a student fails to respond positively to intervention and the provision of support measures, the Failure to Make Academic Progress procedure is invoked (Appendix 3 of the Research Degree Regulations) and may ultimately lead to de-registration.
- Has a student missed submission deadlines, handing in drafts or final assessments late or not at all?
- Is a student unresponsive to feedback, and/or handing in work that shows little or no engagement with feedback?

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Non-compliance

Where a student does not engage fully with their research degree activities, fails to make academic progress or does not attend as required by the Research Degree Regulations, the following procedures will be invoked:

4.1 Failure to make Academic Progress

Where a student fails to make academic progress the procedures for managing unsatisfactory progress will be initiated as set out in Appendix 3 of the Research Degree Regulations.

4.2 Failure to meet Academic Engagement and Attendance expectations

The stages of the process are outlined below. Please note that the University reserves the right to move straight to Stage 2 where a student's actions may impact on the University's legal responsibilities.

A) Stage 1: Faculty Review

- Where a concern is raised regarding engagement and attendance, the details of the concern should be shared with the student and supervisors who may not be aware that there is an issue. The student should be encouraged to speak to their Postgraduate Research Tutor/Convenor (or Deputy Director Postgraduate Research) to identify any support or reasonable adjustments that can be put in place to provide support.
- The student should be encouraged to consult any relevant services within the University or where appropriate a medical practitioner.
- Following the meeting an agreed set of notes and actions should be drawn up and a review date set. The date between the meeting and the review should be no more than one month. These notes should be placed on the student's file.
- Where a student fails to speak to their Postgraduate Research Tutor/Convenor, or where following the review, there are continuing concerns, the student should be invited to meet the Director Postgraduate Research to discuss the concerns and to consider possible solutions. The invitation should be sent in writing five working days before the meeting is due to take place.

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- During the meeting an action plan, with a review date no later than one month after the meeting, should be drafted which outlines the University's expectations of the student, actions required of the student and any details of any support to be provided by the University. The potential consequences of failure by the student to take appropriate actions to address the issues should also be discussed and minuted. If appropriate this may include the possibility of withdrawal/de-registration from the research degree programme.
- The action plan should be shared with the student and their supervisors together with an outline of the consequences of failure to adhere to the action plan. A copy should be placed on the student file.

B) Stage 2: Progress Board Review

- Following Stage 1 and where attendance and engagement continue to fall below the expected levels the matter will be referred to Progress Board which will initiate an investigation..
 - The Chair of Progress Board will, in consultation with other relevant parties, discuss the steps taken to date and consider whether an enhanced action plan would be beneficial or whether action should be taken to withdraw/de-register the student in accordance with the Research Degree Regulations.
 - If the decision is to provide an enhanced action plan a meeting will be arranged with an independent member of Progress Board, the student, their supervisors and the relevant Director of Postgraduate Research. The action plan will be drafted and have a review date. It will be made clear to the student that the consequences of not adhering to the action plan will be withdrawal/de-registration.
 - If the decision is to withdraw/de-register the student the case will be referred to Progress Board for approval.
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4. Student Route Students

As a Student Sponsor, the University is required to monitor the attendance, engagement and academic progress for all Student Route visa holders and to report those who do not attend or engage as required to UK Visa and Immigration.

Where a student's attendance, engagement and academic progress is unsatisfactory this may impact on the University's ability to continue to sponsor their visa. A student may not be able to switch to the Graduate Route to extend their permission to stay in the UK following the withdrawal of sponsorship.

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6. Methods of appeal

- A student may feel that the outcome of the procedure for managing unsatisfactory progress was unacceptable, and that the recommendation for the University to de-register them was unfair, then we recommend a student to use the Student Complaints and Appeals Policy in order to try to re-instate their registration.
- Please note that any appeal through the Student Complaints and Appeals Policy will not normally delay the OU from contacting UKVI.

Further clarification

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please contact the Research Degrees Team (research-degrees-management) who are specially trained to advise on the implementation of policy.

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please submit these to SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk.

Alternative format

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact the Research Degrees via research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk)

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