



# **Student Attendance Policy (Research Students)**

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V1.1	01.12.2014	Registry	7c added - Clarification re Tier4 Points of Conduct added.

## **1 Introduction**

Providing a student experience of the highest possible quality is something that GCU takes very seriously. Promoting and encouraging student engagement with all aspects of their learning experience is a key aspect of this.

This policy has been developed as part of the University's overall Student Attendance & Engagement Strategy which aims to provide a supportive learning environment of which student attendance is one aspect of overall engagement.

The University needs to be able to monitor the attendance and engagement of research students with their doctoral studies for the following reasons:

- a. To aid the retention of students by allowing early identification of those students at risk and allow timely interventions to be made in terms of academic and personal support.
- b. To comply with the requirements of the Home Office under our HTS Tier4 licence that requires us to monitor the attendance accurately of those students subject to visa restrictions so that an attendance return can be made within specified timescales required by the agency.
- c. To enable notifications of withdrawals/suspension to be made on time so that external stakeholders, (e.g. Home Office) are informed in a timely manner.
- d. To meet the demand placed on The University to report absences to employers, Professional Statutory Bodies, or other sponsors where they are funding/co-funding tuition fees and maintenance scholarships.

## **2 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 regular student-supervisor meetings and researcher personal, professional and research training and 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 Tier4 sponsored students in terms of providing appropriate support to international students studying here in the UK and meeting our UKBA licence requirements.

## **3 Student 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, normally once a week (full-time) or every two weeks (part-time) for the first three months and then thereafter a minimum of monthly (full-time) or bi-monthly (part-time) for the remainder of the years of study. The meeting communication can be held face to face or at a distance through means such as email, telephone or teleconferencing.
- d. Ensuring that an accurate log is maintained of meetings/communications with their Director of Studies.
- e. Attending taught courses, personal, professional and research training and development activities as agreed with their supervisors through their personal development planning and ensuring they have their attendance recorded.
- f. For full-time students, gaining this signed permission on their University Holiday and Absence record and returning the record to the School's Research Administrator.
- g. Notifying their Director of Studies in respect of any unplanned or unforeseen absences.
- h. For absences lasting more than 7 days, submit a medical certificate along with their holiday and absence record signed by their Director of Studies (for full-time students) to the School's Research Administrator.
- i. Ensuring that they check their GCU email account on a regular basis for any formal notifications/communications.

## **4 Director of Studies and Supervisor Responsibilities**

- a. Reminding students of the importance of attendance at student-supervisor meetings and University deadlines that must be complied with.
- b. Meeting/communicating regularly with their students, normally once a week (full-time) or every two weeks (part-time) for the first three months and then thereafter a minimum of monthly (full-time) or bi-monthly (part-time) for the remainder of the years of study, ensuring the student completes the standard student-supervisor meeting record template.
- c. 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.
- d. Reviewing and giving permission for absences from their studies due to annual leave, illness, research training in fieldwork, placements, conferences or other explained absences.
- e. For Tier 4 students, notifying the Postgraduate Research Tutor, School's International Officer (or equivalent) and the Graduate School of any significant changes in the student's circumstances, including moving to study at a different location such as undertaking extended periods of greater than 2 months of research activity, fieldwork and/or placement off campus.

- f. Reviewing regularly attendance/absence data and communicating with 'at risk' students in a timely manner, signposting them to relevant support services available within the School or University e.g. the Student's Personal Academic Advisor, School Learning Development Centre, Positive Living & Disability Centre and International Student Support Service.

## **5 School Postgraduate Research Tutors & Research Administrator Responsibilities**

Postgraduate Research Tutors are responsible for:

- a. Communicating with and providing support to "at risk" students when their supervisors raise concerns over their attendance/absence patterns and if needed, signposting "at risk" students to support services available within the University.

School Research Administrators are responsible for:

- b. Reminding students about the University deadlines and procedures that must be complied with.
- c. Keeping the electronic copy of the meeting records in the School files.
- d. Communicating with 'at risk' students in a timely manner, when the supervisors raise concerns over their student's attendance/absence patterns and where appropriate referring students to the postgraduate research tutor for discussions on reasons.
- e. Creating and maintaining holiday and absence records and approval forms, ensuring records are maintained.

## **6 Graduate School Responsibilities**

- a. Informing students of the importance of regular attendance and engagement with their studies and supervisory meetings through various mechanisms, including orientation/induction events, handbooks and communication of policies and regulations in relation to their studies.
- b. Advising students of the support available to them within the University.
- c. Notifying Student Administration Services of any suspensions, extensions and withdrawals of research students from their programme of studies.

## **7 Tier 4 Sponsored Students**

- a. In addition to the above requirements, International Students who are being sponsored by the University on a Tier4 visa must attend 3 attendance checkpoint events (normally held in September, November and 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 UKBA.
- b. When considering an application for a CAS extension, or a CAS in cases where an international student with a non-Tier4 visa wishes to switch to Tier4, a student's attendance/engagement record will be taken into account when a decision is made about whether a CAS will be issued or not.
- c. For Clarity, GCU considers a "Tier4 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 Tier4contact point requirements.

## **8 Annual Leave**

- a. Full-time postgraduate research students are entitled to 35 days holiday and 11 public holidays per year (1<sup>st</sup> October to the following 30<sup>th</sup> 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 student's director of studies prior to annual leave commencing. 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.
- b.

## **9 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.

## **10 Formal Exams and Coursework**

- a. Students who undertake formal taught modules as part of their studies are expected to attend all necessary formal examinations and submit coursework by the published submission dates.
- b. Students who fail to attend an extended formal exam or submit a piece of coursework (where no approved extension has been granted), will be marked as a non-submission.

## Appendix

### Procedure Guide for action taken due to Unsatisfactory Student Attendance and Unexplained Absences

- a. Where a student has failed to attend an expected student-supervisor meeting, the meeting should be re-arranged as quickly as possible and an explanation for the unexpected absence sought by the supervisor.
- b. If repeated efforts to contact and set up a re-arranged meeting are unsuccessful over more than 5 working days, with no satisfactory notification of the reason provided, the Director of Studies should report this unexplained absence to the Postgraduate Research Tutor and the Research Administrator.
- c. The Postgraduate Research Tutor will contact the student (via phone or email) in order to get 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.
- d. Within 4 working days of sending the communications in 'c' above, should no satisfactory response be provided by the student, the School will send a formal communication (via email and post to the student's term address) requesting that they contact the School within 5 working days and provide their School with a satisfactory reason (including medical certification if appropriate) for the absence. The communication will inform them that if they do not respond, then the student will be withdrawn from their programme of studies and relevant external stakeholders informed.
- e. If no appropriate response to communication in "d" above is received within 4 working days, then the School completes a student withdrawal form and submits it to SAS and also informs the Graduate School
- f. SAS will then formally write to the student (via email and posted to term address) informing them that due to continued/repeated absence with no appropriate explanation provided, the student has been withdrawn from their programme of studies. For Tier4 students, they will be informed that the University has withdrawn their sponsorship and informed UKBA and therefore they must make arrangements to return to their home country immediately, signposting them to International student Support Services for advice.
- g. The Graduate School will inform the Higher Degrees Committee and relevant external stakeholders of the student withdrawal.
- h. Where the student has an unexplained or unsatisfactory pattern of non-attendance at meetings or rearrangement of meetings, the Director of Studies should include this in their annual student progress report.