

Attendance Policy

Supplementary to the [*Taught Degree Regulations and Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations*](#).
This document should be read along with the published [*Taught Degree Regulations and Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations*](#).

Contents

Scope	4
Why does the School monitor attendance?	4
Language Year Abroad Students	5
General Tier 4 requirements	5
Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students	5
What are the attendance requirements?	5
What does that mean for me?	6
Minimum attendance thresholds	6
Penalties	7
Postgraduate Research Students	7
What are the attendance requirements?	7
What does that mean for me?	8
Summary of key points	9
Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught	9
Postgraduate Research	9

Scope

Student attendance and engagement is at the heart of the School's function. The current degree regulations include an overall guide to the principles of reasonable attendance whilst this document seeks to expand on this information to provide further information about how attendance is managed across the School and how the School uses attendance data to support students.

Why does the School monitor attendance?

The School has a duty towards maintaining the welfare of our students as well as various duties imposed on us by external bodies who facilitate the running of the School.

In all matters, our primary concern is for our students, their welfare and their success.

By monitoring attendance we can identify times where we may need to offer support to our students. Analysing patterns of attendance can allow us to pick up problems at an early stage. By keeping an eye on attendance levels, we can sometimes see an indication that a student might be going through a difficult time (they've missed a week of classes when they normally never miss a single class) and can reach out to the student to try and offer support if needed.

The more of their classes a student attends, the more opportunities they have to learn the skills and information to help them to successfully pass their degree to the full extent of their ability. This is important to give students the best chance of success in their chosen courses of study.

Students who attend consistently and to a high level not only increase their own chances to learn well and succeed in their course of study, but they also help to improve the learning experience for all students on a course. Being able to share ideas, discuss key issues and learn collaboratively, students acquire a range of new skills to increase their ability to learn and prepare them for the world after study. By monitoring attendance levels, we can identify situations where this rich learning environment is threatened by low attendance and can then try to remedy the situation to improve the quality of learning for all.

In an increasingly competitive world, we want to ensure that our students can get the best out of their time with us and have the best chance possible of leaving us with a well-respected qualification and a wide range of knowledge, not just focused on their final degree field.

For some external bodies, continued high attendance is a condition of the services or opportunities that are offered. For students receiving student loans, these are typically dependent upon the student continuing to engage with their studies to a satisfactory level. Unsatisfactory attendance can lead to cancellation of student loan provision and withdrawal from studies.

Tier 4 international students are subject to a visa condition which requires them to engage fully with their studies. Visa students are expected to make their studies their main priority whilst in the UK and so must be able to show that they are committed and fully engaged with their programme of study. By monitoring student attendance we are able to identify situations where students may need support to help them continue with their studies or re-engage with their studies after a short break for reasons beyond their control. We are also required to report to the Home Office about visa holders who are not complying with the terms of their visa and are effectively breaking the immigration laws established by the UK government. Such reporting is never undertaken lightly but still remains a requirement of our licence to sponsor international students to study with us.

It is important that the School does all it can to promote a positive learning experience for all students. By supporting and enabling students to attend classes to the required standards, we are helping to ensure that

students receive the teaching that they are entitled to and acquire all the relevant knowledge to succeed in their chosen programme of study. Students who attend well, typically achieve well so it is vitally important to our core operations that we offer support readily and in good time. Collecting and monitoring attendance data allows us to do this, ensuring that students receive an excellent dynamic learning experience as well as being supported throughout their studies and empowered to achieve. If we can support all of our students to attend well, it will be clear to see that our students also achieve well.

Language Year Abroad Students

Students undertaking a language year abroad are still expected to meet the attendance expectations applicable to students at SOAS. It is the understanding of the School that students one a year abroad will be subject to the regulations of their host institution for the period of their study abroad and so should be subject to whatever monitoring processes are in place at the host institution.

A host institution may specify a lower required attendance level than the home institution but students will be expected to maintain the academic standards they would demonstrate at home. Students will be expected to report back any periods of significant non-attendance experienced during their year abroad and we may liaise with host institutions to obtain data about our students during their year abroad.

General Tier 4 requirements

Students studying with us who have Tier 4 visas are subject to compulsory attendance monitoring as referred to above. Although this is a requirement placed upon us by the Home Office, we treat this as an opportunity to support our international students rather than trying to catch them out. In addition to the general attendance monitoring undertaken for all students, there is an additional requirement to report to the Home Office in cases where a Tier 4 student misses 10 consecutive scheduled contacts, is absent for more than 60 days or in cases where student attendance is so low that the student runs an increased risk of being unable to complete their programme of study within the time granted for their visa.

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students

What are the attendance requirements?

The taught degree regulations currently in effect regarding attendance are:

8. Attendance Requirements

8.1 Normal expectation of attendance

In order to benefit fully from their studies, 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 any other taught sessions as set out in the School's [Attendance Policy](#).

8.2 Attendance requirements for students repeating a module

Students who are repeating a module must meet the normal class attendance requirements as if taking the module for the first time.

8.3 Minimum attendance thresholds

Some modules may set minimum attendance thresholds for the module which must be met. This is often the case for language modules.

8.4 Authorised absence

Exceptions to attendance requirements will only be made where a student can demonstrate that they have mitigating circumstances in line with the School's [Mitigating Circumstances Policy](#). This will result in their absence from class being designated as authorised.

8.5 Unauthorised absence and penalties

Programme Convenors or Learning and Teaching Coordinators will inform the Associate Director Teaching Quality (Undergraduate) or Associate Director Teaching Quality (Postgraduate), as appropriate, of students who fail to meet the attendance requirements and the steps taken to engage with the student to improve attendance as set out in the School's [Attendance Policy](#). The Associate Director Teaching Quality (Undergraduate) or Associate Director Teaching Quality (Postgraduate) will review each case and decide what further action should be taken. Where a student consistently fails to meet the attendance requirement for a module, they may recommend to the Academic Registrar that the student's module mark be capped at the pass mark (this may impact on the students' degree classification). Where the Associate Director determines that absences from a module have been persistent they may require the student to be withdrawn from the module (this could result in a student not obtaining sufficient credits to achieve a full award). For students who persistently fail to meet the attendance requirements across multiple modules, the Associate Director may recommend to the Academic Registrar that a student's programme registration should be terminated and they be withdrawn from the School.

What does that mean for me?

We expect that students will make every effort to attend all scheduled and required elements of their studies. This includes timetabled activities, lectures, seminars, workshops, tutorials, supervisory meetings, exams and any other activity which may be specified as required or mandatory during their studies.

We recognize the fact that students may have other commitments outside of their studies, however, it is our expectation that students will make reasonable effort to arrange any external commitments to fit in around their studies. We also acknowledge that, from time-to-time, situations may occur which prevent students from attending classes to the expected level.

In some cases, students are able to request that absences be considered as authorised absences if they satisfy the published criteria and can provide suitable evidence. Students who would like to submit a claim for authorised absence should liaise with their department regarding the request and to provide any evidence they may have to support their request for authorised absence through the usual channels of communication with their department.

Absences which are not or cannot be considered as authorised, but which are an unavoidable part of life (such as minor ailments) will not be approved as authorised absences or accepted as grounds for mitigating circumstances for assessment but can be considered in a wider attendance context. If a student is unable to attend for a short duration of time for such a reason, they can still inform the School so that a record can be made of the reason for non-attendance which can be taken into account when assessing student attendance levels and to prevent students being unnecessarily penalised for events beyond their control. We will also consider these absences when assessing student attendance if there appears to be a pattern of non-attendance or if the frequency/duration of non-attendance raises a concern and it is felt that additional support should be offered.

Minimum attendance thresholds

As specified in the regulations, some modules specify minimum attendance thresholds for successful completion of the module. These are applied in conjunction with the general attendance regulations and must be met by any student on such a module. The overall expectation is still that a student will attend all

required elements of their studies but students must consider the requirement that if they are unable to attend, they cannot fall below the specified minimum attendance criteria. Minimum attendance thresholds may be specified to comply with regulatory body requirements and so should be seen as the minimum standard required, not as the target to reach.

Where a module does not have a specified minimum attendance threshold, students will still be expected to attend all scheduled events and may be contacted if their attendance levels are a cause for concern. This monitoring and communication activity will take place throughout the year.

Penalties

As it is in the interest of students to attend and engage fully with their studies, we do not expect to have to apply penalties to students based on low attendance. However, provisions are in place to enable appropriate action to be taken in situations where students are not engaging appropriately with their studies. These actions are balanced to be proportionate to the severity and implications of non-attendance.

Action is taken on a case-by-case basis and each case is assessed on its own merits to determine the level of appropriate action to be taken. As referred to in the degree regulations, penalties could include the recommendation that permission for a student to take the final assessment for a module should be withdrawn (using up one of the rights of re-assessment) or the termination of a student's registration from their programme of study. Such actions would be pursued when it is deemed to be an appropriate course of action for the level of non-attendance demonstrated.

Cases of termination would occur when a student's attendance and subsequent communication (or lack of) effectively constitutes a withdrawal from the course. This is equally applicable for Tier 4 sponsored students who do not engage with their studies or in communication with their sponsor in which case the termination of registration and withdrawal of sponsorship are a statutory requirement for us to carry out in line with the Home Office regulations for student sponsorship.

Further information regarding the application of penalties for low attendance can be found in the [Taught Degree Regulations](#).

Postgraduate Research Students

What are the attendance requirements?

The [Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations](#) (MPhil/PhD) state that the attendance requirements for PGR students are:

4.4 Attendance requirements

4.4.1 Postgraduate research students are required to pursue a continuous course of study at the School under the direction of their supervisors.

4.4.2 Postgraduate research students are considered to be studying in attendance unless registered on a designated distance or blended programme. Students, whether full-time or part-time, are required to undertake research for their degree based at SOAS in London. Students should ensure that they are able to attend SOAS in person regularly to pursue their research and for training and meetings in accordance with the [SOAS Code of Practice for Research Degrees](#) and the [SOAS Attendance Policy](#).

4.4.3 Postgraduate research students studying on a programme specifically designated as being a distance or blended programme are required to attend at SOAS only on such occasions as outlined in their programme specification and the Code of Practice for Distance and Blended Research Degrees. Students are expected to maintain contact with their supervisor and engage with research training and other required activities.

What does that mean for me?

Students on postgraduate research programmes will be subject to attendance monitoring under a different process to that described for taught students.

Postgraduate Research (PGR) student engagement monitoring will be based upon the recording of attendance at supervisory meetings. Students and supervisors will be expected to maintain a full record of supervisory contact through the PhD Manager system which replaces the Moodle logbook. This record of supervisory contact will be checked on a regular basis to ascertain when contacts have taken place or have been missed. Where a scheduled contact has been missed without a reason being recorded, this will be followed up with the supervisor and student to establish the reason for the missed contact and whether any additional support can be offered to rearrange supervisions, to help the student to re-engage with their studies or to address issues of supervisor availability. Students who have missed a contact due to the unavailability of their supervisor will not be considered to have missed the contact and alternative arrangements for recording supervisory contact will be considered.

Missed supervisory contacts will be evaluated against a 60 day absence threshold for full-time students. If a full-time student has missed scheduled contacts which lead to an absence of longer than 60 days without justification or contact, this could indicate a situation where the student has disengaged from their active studies. In this instance, further follow up will be conducted by the School to ascertain the student's circumstances and whether registration should continue or if withdrawal processes should commence. Full time students will be expected to meet their supervisor in line with the published [Code of Practice](#) for PGR students which currently indicates meetings should take place every 2 weeks during the first year and monthly in subsequent years of enrolment.

Part-time students will be expected to meet their supervisor every 4 weeks during the first year and every-other-month in subsequent years. These students will be assessed against a 120 day absence threshold accordingly. UKVI guidance on monitoring requirements for part-time Tier 4 visas has not yet been released. We will endeavor to maintain the 120 day threshold for part-time students in all categories, but this may be subject to alteration once the appropriate guidance has been released by UKVI. If any changes are required, SOAS will work to engage in communication with research students as far in advance of the changes taking effect as possible should there be any implications for the active student body.

PGR students travelling overseas will only be entitled to cover under the SOAS insurance policy where their travel is related to their programme of study and where they have met all of the insurer's requirements for cover (available separately from the Doctoral School). Students on approved periods of fieldwork are expected to maintain contact with their supervisor as agreed in advance of the fieldwork and in line with the relevant degree regulations, handbook and code of practice. Students are expected to return to their studies at SOAS on completion of their fieldwork.

PGR students travelling overseas for purposes not related to their studies will not be eligible for cover under the SOAS insurance policy. Students travelling for reasons unrelated to their studies are invited to discuss their travel plans with their supervisor and would be encouraged to do so if there is a chance that the travel arrangements will have a negative impact on their studies. This will allow for supervisory contacts to be rearranged as required. Students travelling overseas for any reason will be able to request a letter from SOAS in support of their travel plans should they wish to do so. SOAS cannot offer supporting

letters and may be unable to offer full support should students require it during periods of travel which have not been notified in advance to the supervisor/doctoral school. Students are not obliged to notify the doctoral school or their supervisor of travel arrangements except planned fieldwork, planned absences of longer than 60 days or where travel plans will lead to the missing of a scheduled supervision session.

Where appropriate, alternative arrangements can be considered for the recording and monitoring of student engagement for students with Specific Learning Differences or in cases where student/supervisor circumstances make it impossible for face-to-face supervision to take place. Requests for such arrangements should be made to the Doctoral School and the relevant supervisor(s).

This policy will apply equally to all students, regardless of visa status, fee status or nationality.

Summary of key points

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught

- 1) Students should attend all relevant and required activities for the module, including, but not limited to, lectures, tutorials, seminars, language classes and practical classes.
- 2) Where students are unable to attend classes they should notify the School. This should be done as an authorised absence request for eligible cases or as a general notification for absences ineligible for authorisation.
- 3) Action will not be taken against students with unauthorised absences as long as adequate notification is given and cases of unauthorised absence are for appropriate and unavoidable reasons that are clearly not an attempt to circumvent the attendance policy.
- 4) Deliberate attempts to circumvent the attendance policy are likely to be investigated and could lead to appropriate action being taken or a penalty being applied.
- 5) Students repeating a module or year of study are expected to maintain the same standards of attendance as a student studying the same element for the first time unless appropriate written permission has been granted to the student by the School in writing.
- 6) Students are expected to attend all required activities. In addition to this requirement, students need to be aware of any applicable minimum attendance thresholds for their modules of study. Failure to meet minimum attendance thresholds could lead to the student being ineligible to fully complete their degree or programme of study.
- 7) Students should notify the school of non-attendance within a reasonable timeframe of the absence taking place and should do so in writing, by email or via the Student Information Desk (SID) and should include evidence where possible.
- 8) Where student attendance is below the level expected and no explanation has been provided, the School will seek to contact the student and signpost possible sources of support.
- 9) Students wishing to arrange a sanctioned period of non-attendance should ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place with their department before the period of absence begins. Failure to make appropriate arrangements could lead to termination of registration.
- 10) Tier 4 students will be subject to the standard attendance monitoring process for their level of study (taught or research) as well as twice yearly checks on consecutive attendance points as detailed in the Tier 4 Processes and Procedures.
- 11) Students on a language year abroad are expected to be monitored by their host institution but should update SOAS of any significant changes or periods of non-attendance.

Postgraduate Research

- 1) A record of supervisory contact should be maintained in the Haplo PhD Manager System. Supervisors and students can record information in this system.

- 2) In the case of a missed contact, the School will follow up with the student and the supervisor regarding the reasons for the contact being missed.
- 3) Supervisory contact is expected every 2 weeks for first year full time students, monthly for all other full time students. Full time students who are not on planned fieldwork and who have no evidence of supervisory contact for 60 days will be contacted regarding their engagement and their supervisor will be contacted to check on progress. Following investigation, withdrawal proceedings could be instigated if deemed appropriate.
- 4) Part time students are expected to meet every 4 weeks in their first year and every 2 months in following years. Part time students who are not on planned fieldwork and who have no evidence of supervisory contact for 120 days will be contacted regarding their engagement and their supervisor will be contacted to check on progress. Following investigation, withdrawal proceedings could be instigated if deemed appropriate.
- 5) Students on approved fieldwork should remain in contact with their supervisor as agreed in advance of travel. If circumstances lead to a need to change the contact schedule, this should be agreed and recorded in PhD Manager.
- 6) Students are only required to notify SOAS of travel in relation to planned fieldwork, planned absences of 60 days or more or where the planned absence will lead to the student missing a planned supervisory contact. Students and supervisors should work together to rearrange contacts within a reasonable timeframe if either party is unable to attend.

Document Version

Valid from	Author	Changes	Published
2017/18	Rebecca Harrison, Academic Registrar	Policy introduced. Approved by LTQC 31.05.2017.	August 2017
2018/19	Gareth Roberts, Tier 4 Visa Compliance Manager	Clarification of requirements for PGR students. Approved by LTQC 03.05.2018.	August 2018