Policy on Student Engagement 2020/21

1. Introduction

1.1. The University has introduced a new dual delivery approach to learning and teaching (Ignite) for the 2020/21 academic year that combines face-to-face, on-campus study with flexible digital learning. Ignite enables the University to react quickly to any changes in the local and global management of COVID-19 whilst supporting the individual needs of its students. The revised approach to student engagement reflects these principles.

1.2. The University expects students to engage fully with their programme of study, join scheduled on-campus teaching events where it is safe to do so, and participate in live and other online teaching events that are part of their programme.

1.3. Regular engagement is an important aspect of learning and the student experience. Ignite aims to provide as much of an on-campus experience as is possible, whilst maintaining the safety of students and staff. Students who fully engage with all aspects of their programmes whether online or face-to-face teaching events are more likely to succeed with their studies. This policy is designed to support student achievement by encouraging students to engage actively with all learning activities and support offered.

1.4. The University recognises that engagement with a programme of study takes many forms including participation in face-to-face or online teaching, group work, workshops and online interactive content, and completion of online non-interactive content, coursework and assessments. This policy sets out the University’s expectations on student engagement and the potential consequences of non-engagement.

2. Scope

2.1. This policy applies to all campus-based undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and concerns student engagement with on-campus and online sessions. The policy:

- outlines expectations around student online engagement
- articulates the University’s expectations with respect to engagement with timetabled on-campus teaching
- explains action taken when the expectations are not met
- complies with the regulatory requirements articulated in Senate Regulation 4: Regulations Governing Student Attendance
- ensures that the University can meet the requirements of UKVI relating to Tier 4 sponsored students.

2.2. The Procedures for Managing the Policy on Student Engagement explain how this policy operates in practice.
2.3. For the academic year 2020/21, this policy replaces the Policy on Attendance at Timetabled Teaching Events.

3. Principles

3.1. This policy supports the aims of the University’s Learning Strategy, including dual delivery. It evidences an ongoing commitment to delivering a student experience that engenders success, supported by a strong focus on retention and engagement and on identifying and supporting students who may need help and guidance to help them succeed in their studies. The University believes that active engagement with all learning and teaching activities is an important factor in enabling students to achieve academic success.

3.2. Ignite recognises that students need the flexibility to move between on-campus and virtual learning environments in the event that circumstances change. It explicitly recognises a range of ways in which students can engage with their programmes. It is therefore important that programme teams monitor student engagement with a variety of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities in order to identify students who may have circumstances that are affecting their studies and provide support to them where appropriate.

3.3. This policy seeks to ensure that all students are treated equally and fairly in respect of their engagement, whilst recognising that students may face specific challenges during their studies.

3.4. Where there is a concern around a student’s engagement, the student’s School will contact them to ensure that they are aware of the support available and the courses of action open to them.

4. Engagement Requirements

4.1. In accordance with Senate Regulation 4, students are expected to participate in all timetabled face-to-face and online teaching events associated with their programme of study in order to achieve the maximum benefit from the learning opportunities offered to them.

4.2. On certain programmes of study students are required to engage at a specified level in order to qualify for their award. Where there are such requirements they will be stated in module specifications and communicated to students in programme handbooks and other programme information. Equally, where engagement through timetabled events is optional, students will be notified in programme handbooks and other programme information.

4.3. As a condition of its licence to sponsor students under Tier 4 of the UK Government’s Points-Based Immigration Scheme (PBS), the University is required to monitor the engagement of Tier 4 sponsored students and to withdraw sponsorship from students who do not meet the engagement requirements. These expectations may vary in accordance with Tier 4 guidance issued by the Home Office and this policy will be updated to reflect changes to UKVI requirements during the course of the 2020/21 academic year.
4.4. Some Professional or Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) may set out engagement requirements for all students as a condition of accreditation that are more stringent than those set out in this policy. In such cases, these requirements are stated in programme specifications and are communicated to students in programme handbooks and other programme information. This point relates particularly, but not necessarily exclusively, to programmes regulated by the General Medical Council (GMC).

4.5. Ignite builds on the University’s commitment to the innovative use of learning technologies to support the student learning experience. Synchronous and asynchronous teaching events will be available to students online and delivered alongside synchronous face-to-face sessions, with which students are expected to engage.

5. **Engagement Expectations and Monitoring**

5.1. The expectation is that students in the UK will be on campus for mandatory face-to-face teaching events scheduled in their timetables.

5.2. Schools will monitor participation in face-to-face teaching events in the context of students’ individual circumstances.

5.3. Whilst the University’s campus-based courses are full-time, with dual delivery a significant amount of teaching may be delivered online. The expectation is that students will engage fully and regularly with online content, which will include:
   - synchronous (live) interactive sessions, such as seminars, and tutorials
   - pre-recorded lectures and other asynchronous teaching content
   - laboratory and practical-based teaching sessions.

5.4. Students will be expected to join live/synchronous remote teaching events in order to facilitate active participation. Where students’ circumstances do not permit this, for example if they are located in a different time zone, they should access any available recordings as soon as possible after the event.

5.5. Students must submit all assessments, including coursework and examinations by published deadlines. Regulations governing the late submission of work continue to apply.

6. **Authorised Absences**

6.1. The University recognises that some students may be unable to attend campus in person depending on their personal circumstances and the UK Government’s guidance at particular times. Students in this position should notify their School that they wish to engage remotely with their studies. This may be for the following reasons:
   - if students or a family member are shielding
   - if students are unable to travel to the UK
   - if students are self-isolating in relation to a health condition.

6.2. Students may request to study remotely for a whole semester. Students may also request a shorter period of absence, and processes are set out below.
6.3. It may not be possible to study remotely for all courses. If there are compulsory external engagement requirements, such as placements, that a student will be unable to meet, they should discuss their options with their School; these may include a temporary suspension of studies.

6.4. Home/EU students who are not present on campus for teaching should be aware that this may impact on the level of maintenance loan they are eligible to receive from the Student Loans Company (SLC). The decision regarding whether to study remotely, where this is possible, ultimately sits with the student and they are responsible for ensuring they are aware of any financial implications.

6.5. Tier 4 students and students enrolled on programmes with external requirements, such as placements, who are unable to attend campus will need to obtain a formal authorisation that they should request via their School Office in the first instance.

6.6. Requests submitted by Tier 4 students will be considered in line with current UKVI guidance and concessions.

6.7. Students studying remotely should continue to engage with online materials and report any absence from timetabled sessions, due to illness or any other reason, to their School at the earliest opportunity.

6.8. Students who are not studying remotely and are normally present on campus but who will be absent from face-to-face teaching or online events for a short period should notify their School at the earliest opportunity providing clear and credible reasons for the absence. Students must take full responsibility for the completion of outstanding academic work.

6.9. Students who are absent due to illness or other reason including COVID-19 or due to self-isolation or quarantine, should inform the University at the earliest possible opportunity so that appropriate action can be taken. Students in this position should continue to access online materials regularly, if they remain well. Schools will liaise directly with students who indicate they are unfit to study.

6.10. In accordance with Senate Regulation 4, students may request permission from their programme team for short periods of absence for personal or religious reasons.

6.11. In accordance with Senate Regulation 7, if a student has been unable to sit an examination or submit coursework for assessment as a result of circumstances which have caused them to be absent from scheduled teaching events, they should submit a mitigating circumstances claim.

6.12. If a student’s circumstances are such that they are likely to be unable to engage with their studies on an ongoing basis, they should discuss the possibility of a suspension of studies with their personal tutor or other programme contact. Schools should seek advice on the implications of suspension of study for Tier 4 visa holders from the University’s Student Immigration Advice and Compliance Team.

7. Non-engagement

7.1. The University will proactively both support and monitor student engagement in order to help students achieve the best possible academic outcome.
7.2. Full information on how this policy is applied, including signposting to support and escalation processes, is detailed in the Procedures for Managing the Policy on Student Engagement.

7.3. Schools will monitor students’ engagement with online materials and activities as well as on-campus teaching events on a weekly basis.

7.4. Students who do not engage with their studies by accessing online materials or participating in teaching events will be considered to be ‘at risk’ and will be contacted by their School to determine what support is required.

7.5. Schools will continue to monitor ‘at risk’ students and may withdraw students who, after supportive and appropriate intervention fail to engage or re-engage within one calendar month or any other reasonable timeframe agreed by the School.

7.6. Students who have provided a valid reason for their low level of engagement (as measured by the University’s weekly engagement monitoring system), should discuss the options available to them with their School.

8. Patterns of Dis-engagement

8.1. Schools will monitor students’ overall engagement with their programme. If patterns of engagement give cause for concern that a student may be experiencing difficulty in engaging with their studies, then the reasons for this will be explored directly with the student and the School may decide to move the student to the at ‘risk/concern’ category.

8.2. Examples of patterns of engagement that may be explored with students include:

- Patterns of non-engagement with on-campus events, particularly mandatory teaching events or sessions, where students are not known to be studying remotely or to have authorised absence from such events
- Patterns of non-engagement with online teaching events including seminars and tutorials
- Patterns of non-engagement with online course materials related to a specific module, or specific event types such as tutorials
- Patterns of non-engagement with assessment
- Patterns of non-engagement with placements or other external activities
- For Tier 4 visa holders: patterns of non-engagement that suggest that a student is in danger of breaching the conditions of their visa.

8.3. Students will be contacted by their School to offer support and guidance. Those who fail to re-engage satisfactorily with their studies within a timetable deemed reasonable by the School but not exceeding 30 days should be referred to a Student Engagement Panel who will review the student’s overall engagement and performance and determine next steps.

9. Student Engagement Experts and Panels

9.1. Student Engagement Experts will review engagement in the first instance, and identify cases that require consideration by a Student Engagement Panel. The Student
Engagement Expert will be a member of the School’s professional services team with sufficient seniority and experience to undertake the role effectively, and is likely to be the person who is also the Mitigating Circumstances Expert. The Student Engagement Expert will be trained and have access to all relevant information and systems to enable them to make an informed decision on whether to refer a student to a Panel.

9.2. The Student Engagement Expert will determine the cases that require consideration by a Panel. These will normally include all ‘at risk’ students who have failed to engage or re-engage with their studies as follows:

- Students who are absent consistently from timetabled compulsory on-campus teaching events who are not known to be studying remotely or have been granted authorised absence
- Students who fail to participate in live on-line teaching events, including seminars and tutorials
- Students whose pattern of engagement with online activities and materials causes concern that academic and/or compliance requirements are not being met due to their infrequency.

9.3. Student Engagement Panels will be chaired by the Senior Tutor or another member of academic staff nominated by the Head of School and will comprise at least three academic and professional services staff who have experience, knowledge and expertise in reviewing non-engagement cases. Student Engagement Panels are likely to be run alongside Mitigating Circumstances Panels.

9.4. The Procedures for Managing the Policy on Student Engagement outline how Student Engagement Panels should be operated and the possible outcomes that may result from the consideration of student cases.

10. Appeals against Student Engagement Panel Decisions

10.1. A student may only appeal against a Student Engagement Panel decision if there are, or were, circumstances materially affecting their ability to engage appropriately with their studies. There should be supporting evidence not known to the Student Engagement Panel at the time its decision was taken, and which it was not possible for the student to make known beforehand.

10.2. A student must submit an appeal on his or her own behalf, within five working days of the notification of their withdrawal of registration. Appeals should be made on the withdrawal of registration appeal form, with evidence attached, and submitted to AMappeals@le.ac.uk.

10.3. Appeals will be considered by the Head of Student Operations or their nominee.

10.4. Notification of the outcome of the appeal will complete the University’s procedures and students will be issued with a Completion of Procedures Letter that will include information on the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

11. Tier 4 Sponsored Students
11.1. The University holds a Tier 4 Sponsor Licence that permits it to sponsor international students who wish to undertake full-time study at the University of Leicester under the UKVI Tier 4 Points-Based System. As a Tier 4 Sponsor, the University has specific responsibility to act in accordance with the Tier 4 Immigration Rules and Sponsor Guidance. Any changes to UKVI rules will supercede the relevant sections of this policy.

11.2. The UKVI has clear expectations with respect to the engagement of Tier 4 students in relation to Covid-19 and requires the University to monitor engagement closely.

11.3. Campus-based Tier 4 students in the UK are required to join all face-to-face teaching events unless the University has granted an authorised exception. Where students have missed 10 consecutive teaching events, without providing a valid explanation within a reasonable timeframe, the University will withdraw sponsorship and notify the UKVI, as outlined in our Tier 4 sponsor duties.

11.4. The UKVI expects the University to monitor patterns of engagement to ensure that students engage fully with their studies and are not missing particular sessions/days on a regular basis. Where on-campus engagement falls below an acceptable level and a reasonable acceptable explanation is not provided the Student Immigration Advice and Compliance Team will contact students to discuss concerns that they are not meeting the conditions of their visa.

11.5. Students who are absent from face-to-face studies as a result of switching to study remotely, that has been formally authorised by the University, are not required to be present at face-to-face teaching sessions and will not be reported to the UKVI for non-engagement. Students wishing to obtain authorisation should submit requests to their School Office in the first instance.

11.6. Tier 4 students who are authorised to study remotely must remain engaged with their online studies. In line with current UKVI guidance the University will withdraw sponsorship immediately from students studying remotely who stop engaging with their studies for reasons other than Covid-19. To prevent this, students must report Covid-19 related absences as outlined in section 6.

11.7. Tier 4 students who are not engaging with their course and fail to access online materials, or participate in virtual or face-to-face events for the modules studied on a regular basis will be considered ‘at risk’. Students in this position will be contacted initially by their School. The Student Immigration and Advice team will monitor the student’s progress. Students who fail to re-engage with their studies within a reasonable timeframe as determined by SIAC, and not exceeding 30 days, are likely to have their sponsorship withdrawn. SIAC will carry out periodic checkpoints for the withdrawal of sponsorship.

11.8. Students who wish to appeal a withdrawal of studies should follow the process outlined in section 10.

12. Data Protection

12.1. All student records in relation to student engagement and decisions taken in relation to student registration status will be subject to the University’s Data Protection code of practice and data retention schedule.