

Principles of Student Attendance & Engagement

September 2020

Background

A student engagement approach allows us to involve students as active participants in the learning environment, to enhance their educational experiences and to share responsibility for mutual support within our learning community. This document outlines the principles of student engagement at Middlesex University and articulates the mechanisms by which Middlesex University enables, supports and monitors students' engagement with their studies. This document also outlines support for staff to promote active dialogue with students about managing expectations about engaging with their studies, and how it can be determined.

Scope

- The swift pivot to blended model of online/on campus delivery of learning and teaching in the 2020/2021 academic year has prompted us to follow an engagement approach and to temporarily suspend our attendance monitoring policy. The principles of student engagement have been written to align with our blended model of delivery for the 2020/2021 academic year.
- Evidence suggests that academic success correlates with full engagement with timetabled (synchronous) teaching sessions and also with access to course-related (asynchronous) learning resources and support materials, held within the Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle/My Learning). In addition, all students must meet the necessary assessment requirements for their course.
- This document sets out how the University supports students to attend timetabled teaching sessions, to engage fully with their studies, what the University expects of students in relation to engagement with their course, how it will monitor that engagement, the process involved and actions taken where students are not engaging.
- Additional requirements for student attendance and/or engagement on PSRB programmes will be specified within the relevant programme handbook.
- International students who are covered by Home Office Tier 4 requirements need to be aware that they have additional obligations. These are set out in the Tier 4 Attendance Policy, outlined in Appendix 1, below.

Overview of Student Engagement

The University supports student engagement in a number of ways:

- By providing high-quality pre-entry, induction and transitional support information, activities and processes that are designed to ensure that students are familiar with the requirements of their course and know how to access facilities, services and support;
- By providing high quality, blended (online and on campus) teaching and learning experiences (both synchronous and asynchronous);
- By providing high quality course-related learning resources and support materials within the Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle); supported by a Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Framework;
- By providing a range of academic, wellbeing and student support services.

Three Student Engagement Principles

The ways that the University monitors student engagement are set out in the further sections of this document. The indicators of engagement outlined below are aimed at identifying any issues and difficulties at an early stage (early intervention) and to support staff to work with students to facilitate their full engagement with their studies (transitional support). The three principles of engagement are as follows:

(1) A Commitment to Attend Timetabled Sessions:

Considering attendance: Whilst the attendance policy is suspended, we are still adhering to several principles outlined in that policy, asking students to make a commitment to attend all live (synchronous) online sessions and, where possible, engage in scheduled on-campus sessions. Whilst expectations around attendance will be firmly established and reinforced by Programme Teams from the beginning of term, we will not be actively monitoring attendance during the 2020/2021 academic year, except for International students. As outlined in Appendix 1, below, attendance monitoring will, however, be in place for International students studying on-campus. The University must monitor attendance at timetabled teaching and learning events that are scheduled to take place on campus in order to remain compliant with the sponsor licence granted by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). In place of formal attendance monitoring we will instead be using two primary indicators of student engagement, outlined below.

Managing absence: where a student occasionally misses a timetabled learning session or event due to illness or other circumstance (for example, studying across time zones) we will ask them to notify the appropriate Module Leader or Module Tutor that they are unable to attend. The Standard Operating Procedure for Campus Visits, outlined below, identifies arrangements for students visiting campus and those who show symptoms of Covid19. Primary and secondary indicators of student engagement, outlined below, will be used to determine a student's engagement and progress on their course and to support them if they are disengaging. Please also note that separate arrangements are in place for monitoring attendance on-campus for students studying on a Tier 4 visa. Please consult the Tier 4 attendance policy, outlined in Appendix 1, below.

Class Cancellations and Technical Difficulties : Programme Teams should keep a local record of any timetabled activities which have not been able to take place (or partly take place) due to staff absence or technical difficulties. If there are ongoing issues, these should be reported to the Head of Department. Students should be kept up to date via My Learning, preferably before the timetabled activity is due to happen, if that is reasonably practical to do so.

Students in Receipt of SLC Funding: for the purposes of confirming attendance for students in receipt of funds from the Student Loans Company we intend to link these to the SLC census points. These are the points throughout the year where students are required to be "attending" their programme of study in order to release maintenance and tuition fee payments. Attendance in this context means engaging with their programme of study, as outlined below.

To make notifications in a timely manner, Student Records will need confirmation of students who are not engaging with their programme of study, and who are to be withdrawn. Regular reports will be sent to Programme Leaders to assist them to do this, highlighting students at increased risk

of disengagement. Additional nudges will also be included as we near the census date. Programme Leaders are asked to send through this information to Student Records by the following dates:

- Friday 27th November 2020
- Friday 19th March 2021

(2) Primary indicators of student engagement:

There will be two primary indicators of student engagement, both will be displayed in Tableau:

- **Logins to My Learning (Moodle).** As a minimum, it is expected that students will login to My Learning at least 3 times per week (12 times per month) in order to fulfil the requirements of their course, unless separate arrangements for accessing learning content is in place, e.g. via a Zoom channel. Please note that Programme Teams with high contact hours may decide to set higher thresholds, and there may be higher thresholds in place for programmes where there are Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements.
- **Logins to MyUniHub.** As a minimum, it is expected that students will login to MyUniHub at least once per week in order to make sure that they keep up to speed with University communications, updates and access information which is of relevance to them during their studies.

(3) Secondary indicators of student engagement:

There will be several secondary indicators of student engagement, also available on Tableau, which are designed to provide Programme Teams with additional information about students' online and on-campus activity and assist with contextualising the primary indicators of student engagement outlined above. Secondary indicators will provide important additional context about a student's engagement with their learning environment and with learning resources:

The secondary indicators of engagement are:

- **Card swipes** – enabling staff to see whether a student has been active on-campus. Please note that this will not apply to those students who are studying wholly online.
- **My MDXapp Logins** – where appropriate, enabling staff to see whether a student has logged into the MDX App.
- **My MDXapp Tile Clicks** – where appropriate, enabling staff to see whether a student has clicked onto tiles in the MDX App.
- **Library materials** – enabling staff to see how many times a student has accessed online material from the library and/or loaned a library resource.
- **Library loans** – enabling staff to see the number of times a student has gone through EZproxy or OpenAthens authentication to access online material.

Applying Student Engagement Principles

We will be communicating centrally with students to inform them about expectations around engagement with their programme during this academic year.

- All students are responsible for:
 - Attending timetabled learning sessions or events, as identified by their timetable. Whilst we will not be formally monitoring students' attendance this year, students will be strongly encouraged to attend timetabled sessions. For on-campus sessions we will only be monitoring International student attendance, as outlined in Appendix 1, below.
 - Participating in learning activities, as directed by their Programme Team, and adhering to the Principles of Online Classroom Conduct, outlined below.
 - Meeting the primary engagement requirements, as identified in this document.
 - Letting Programme Teams know if they are going to be absent from a live (synchronous) timetabled session, for whatever reason. Students are encouraged to use the authorised absence form for short-term absences and, for absences of more than two weeks, use the extenuating circumstances process.

- Programme Teams are responsible for:
 - Highlighting the importance of attendance at timetabled sessions, having a dialogue with students about the importance of engagement and outlining any additional and programme-specific attendance requirements, and letting students know how to make contact if they are absent.
 - Monitoring students' engagement by considering primary student engagement indicators, namely logins to MyUniHub and My Learning to ensure that students are meeting agreed thresholds. Secondary indicators can provide context for Programme Teams in considering the engagement of their cohorts.
 - Using the **When to Refer Guide** to refer students to accredited practitioner teams offering advice on matters such as disability & dyslexia support, counselling & mental health, money matters and finance & welfare <https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/policy-bank> and staff can refer to **UniHelp** <https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/support/unihelp>.
 - Programme Teams are also responsible for considering patterns of engagement over a period of time, using Tableau reports in order to do so. It is expected that staff especially monitor engagement during welcome week, and in weeks to one six of the new term, to support new and continuing students to settle in.
 - Highlighting whether there are any additional requirements for their programme, depending on Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements.
 - Identifying students who may benefit from support aimed at helping the student to successfully complete the course.

Identifying and Supporting Disengaged Students

The Covid19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to the educational experiences of both new and continuing students. By September 2020, many students will have been out of a structured educational environment for six months or more. To assist a student with transition and to support students who may become disengaged Programme Teams are asked to consider the following:

Identifying Disengaged Students

Appendix 2, at the end of this document, is designed to assist Programme Teams to identify disengaged students.

- **Using Primary & Secondary Engagement Indicators:**
 - Programme Teams are asked to use the primary indicators of student engagement, namely MyLearning (Moodle) and MyUniHub logins to determine patterns of engagement and disengagement, via Tableau.
 - The two Primary indicators above have been disaggregated in Tableau to assist Programme Teams in deciding how to identify disengaged students, incorporating any local arrangements for engagement which may be in place.
 - Secondary indicators will provide important additional context to inform decision-making and next steps.
- **Viewing Student Engagement Data on Tableau:**
 - Staff can view engagement information on Tableau, accessible through the [staff intranet](#) or via [this link](#) (you must be Firewalled and signed into the VPN). The information is presented in an easy to understand format and can be filtered to reflect the department, school, programme, Personal Tutor's tutees or by individual student. Reports will also be sent to Programme Teams identifying students who are at risk of disengagement.
- **Supporting International Students:**
 - International students may be studying across time zones. In this situation it may be difficult for them to engage in live (synchronous) sessions on a regular basis. Programme Teams are asked to reassure international students that they will be supported to engage with their programme, primarily via accessing resources and contributing to activities via MyLearning.
- **Considering on-campus sessions:**
 - Some students may not be able to access on-campus timetabled sessions. This may be for various reasons, including that they are studying in a different country, have symptoms of Covid19 or are shielding because they are vulnerable. Programme Teams are asked to reassure students that attendance at on-campus sessions is highly recommended, but not compulsory. Separate arrangements are in place for attending on-campus sessions for International students, outlined in Appendix 1.
 - Where students are prevented from attending on-campus sessions, arrangements are in place to support them to engage in a different way. Please consult the guidance for on-campus teaching: <https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/policy-bank>.

When to Refer to Specialist Advice Services

In the course of their studies, our students may face various challenges, both personal and academic, which affect their ability to access and engage with their programme and with the University. At Middlesex, there is a range of specialist advice services that complement the support provided in the Faculties and can help students to remain on their programme and achieve their potential. Support includes accredited practitioner teams offering advice on matters such as disability & dyslexia support, counselling & mental health, and finance & welfare. These services work closely with other teams such as UniHelp, Learning Enhancement Team (LET), Progression & Support Team (PST) and other professional staff across the University. Issues will arise that may be immediate matters of concern, or require advice and intervention from qualified professionals or specialists in aspects of University

procedures, or may simply be queries that only arise occasionally. This Principles of Engagement paper should be read in conjunction with the **When to Refer Guide** which is designed to help any member of academic or professional or Students' Union staff and staff can refer to UniHelp <https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/support/unihelp>. The guide is designed to help refer quickly and confidently, direct students to the advice and support they need, when they need it: <https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/policy-bank>.

Supporting Disengaged Students

- **Engagement thresholds:** If a student falls beneath the required MyLearning login level of 3 times per week (12 times per month) for a consistent period of three weeks, staff are asked to contact the student by email to check whether they are progressing well. After this initial contact, staff (either Personal Tutors and/or Module Leaders) are asked to continue to monitor an individual student's engagement for a further three weeks and, if no improvement is seen, to have a formal meeting with that student.
- **Referral to central student support services:** staff are encouraged to use the **When to Refer Guide** <https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/policy-bank> to support students and to signpost and refer them to relevant sources of support. Staff can refer directly to UniHelp: <https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/support/unihelp>.
- **Transitional support:** staff are asked to make use of the principles outlined in the supporting students transitioning into HE document, [https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/media/intranet/document-library/cape-documents/Supporting-students-transitioning-to-HE_fv-002-002.pdf], and have a dialogue with students about engagement and the importance of managing expectations. The responses to the university pre-arrival questionnaire can be used to facilitate and contextualise this discussion.
- **Late starters and late enrollers:** are considered to be at increased risk of disengagement. Staff are asked to consider primary and secondary indicators of engagement to identify whether there are any patterns of disengagement and to provide transitional support, signposting to university resources and advice and guidance, and to information posted on MyUniHub.
- **Interruptions to study:** the Programme Team may also decide that it would be in the best interest of the student to interrupt their studies or change their mode of study. This is likely to be in cases where students have missed too much of their course to have a reasonable chance of catching up and succeeding with their studies, regardless of the cause. In cases where the programme team agree that an Interruption of Studies is appropriate, students will be referred to the **Progression and Support team** for advice and guidance.

Principles of Online Classroom Conduct

In addition to the Student Engagement Principles outlined above, students will be provided with guidance on good online classroom conduct which will reiterate and reinforce the principles of student engagement, including expected attendance at timetabled sessions, whilst also emphasising the importance of good conduct in an online classroom setting, promoting a respectful, inclusive and tolerant learning environment. The late arrival policy will also be suspended for this year, and the Principles of Online Classroom Conduct will encourage students to attend sessions in a timely manner,

with little disruption. The Principles of Online Classroom Conduct can be found here: <https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/policy-bank>.

Standard Operating Procedure for Campus Visits

A risk assessment has been created to help students assess the level of risk for them of coming on campus. This is not mandatory and is intended to support students in deciding the best course of action for them. Upon completion of an online form they receive an email suggesting actions for them depending on whether they are Green, Amber or Red. The role of the Programme Leader is to provide the student options for their studies and refer to other teams (such as the Progression and Support Team (PST)) if necessary. The decision about how to proceed remains with the student. Separate guidance has been created about this process: <https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/policy-bank>

Appendix 1 - Attendance Monitoring for Tier 4 Students, 2020/21

Preamble

The University has adopted a blended learning approach for 2020/21 in response to COVID-19. As a consequence, the Attendance Policy and Attendance Monitoring software have been suspended for this academic year. New *Principles of Student Attendance and Engagement* have been approved in order to support students in this environment where a significant amount of learning may take place in an online setting.

Scope

These provisions apply to all Tier 4 sponsored students. The University must monitor attendance at timetabled teaching and learning events that are scheduled to take place on-campus in order to remain compliant with the sponsor licence granted by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). Tier 4 students will additionally be covered by the University's *Principles of Student Attendance and Engagement* which sets out the ways in which engagement will be tracked and supported. UKVI's position in relation to attendance monitoring is continually under review. These provisions are subject to periodic amendment in line with revisions required by UKVI.

Provisions

1. Middlesex University is required to monitor Tier 4 sponsored students and to maintain attendance records for on-campus teaching.
2. Non-attendance at timetabled teaching events on-campus will be reported where necessary in line with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) regulations as well as the Immigration Rules.
3. Tier 4 students who are unable to attend campus-based sessions or engage with online learning due to COVID-19 (illness or travel restrictions) will be exempted from the attendance requirements, and will be supported by the University through provisions in the *Principles of Student Attendance and Engagement*.
4. Tier 4 students undertaking pre-sessional or Foundation level programmes of study are required to attend a minimum of 85% of campus-based study each month. Sponsorship may be withdrawn where attendance falls below 70% for three consecutive months.

5. For blended-learning programmes, the University will withdraw sponsorship where a student has failed to engage with online learning for a period of 30 days following the date on which initial concerns about engagement were raised with the student.
6. For wholly campus-based learning, the University will withdraw sponsorship where a student has failed to engage for a period of 60 days following the date on which initial concerns were first raised with the student.

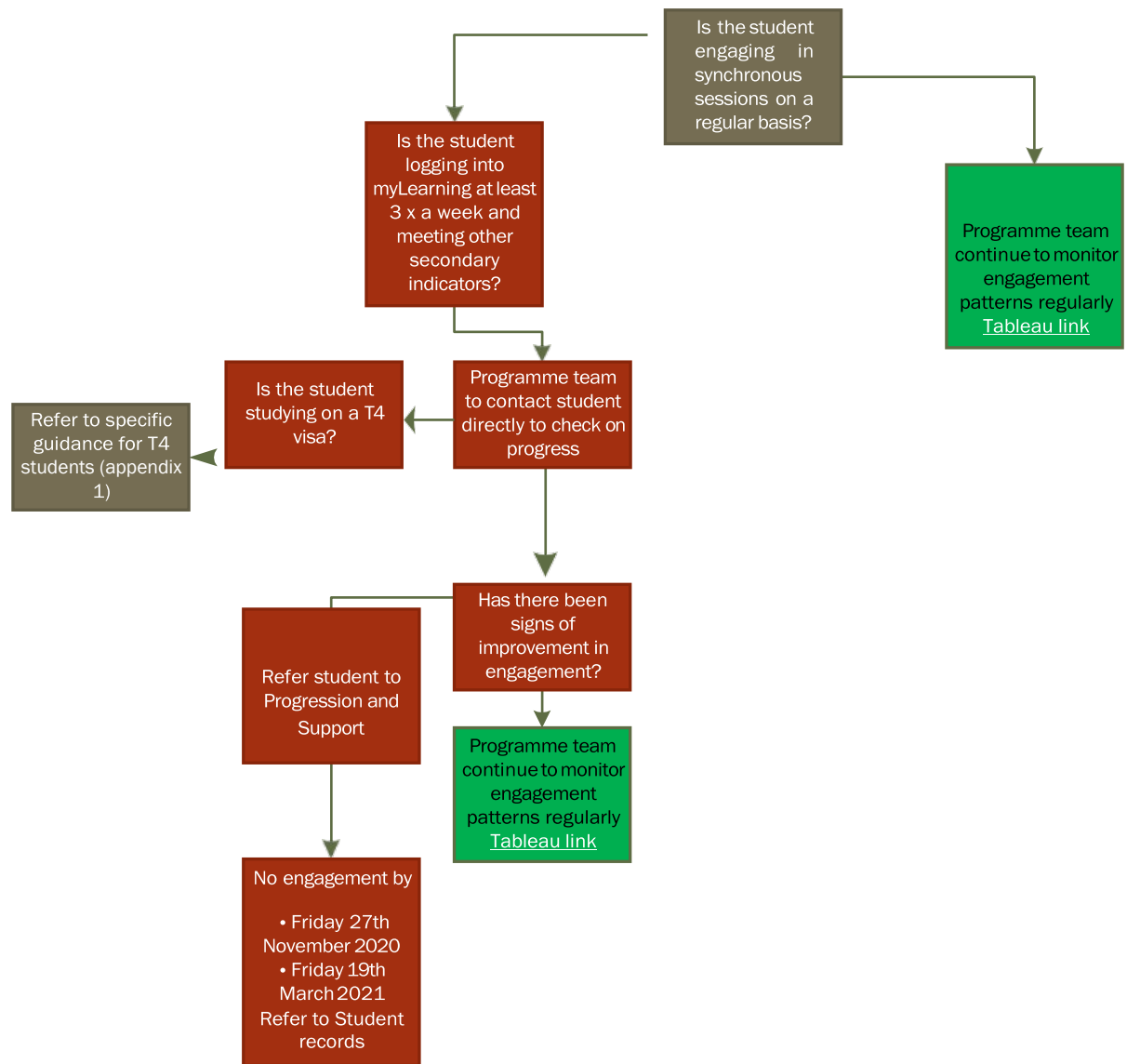
Useful links

Government policy, rules and guidance:

- *Immigration Rules* - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules>
- *Tier 4 of the Points-Based System – Policy Guidance to be used for all Tier 4 applications made on or after 29th October 2019* - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/843003/T4_Migrant_Guidance_October_2019.pdf
- *Temporary concessions in response to COVID-19* - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/913903/Tier_4_Guidance_-_Covid-19_response_200901.pdf

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Appendix 2 – The Process for Identifying and Supporting Disengaged Students



Programme Teams asked to reinforce, on a regular basis, expectations around attendance and engagement, and endorse support on offer for students who are struggling. The **Principles of Online Classroom Conduct** should be used to contextualise support and discussions. The engagement of late starters/late enrollers and International Students is especially important.