

Engagement and Attendance Monitoring Report

School of Informatics

22/06/16

Following the recent case of a Tier 4 sponsored PhD student whose record did not reflect the fact that he had returned home following the break down in his supervision arrangements, the School of Informatics acknowledges that there were significant deficiencies in our attendance and monitoring procedures, which had a negative impact on the pastoral provision for the student, as well as on managing UKVI compliance requirements. The University has a duty to record and report students' attendance and engagement and any changes to location of studies under the terms of the sponsor licence and therefore neglecting to keep robust records has the potential to negatively impact the University's licence to sponsor international students. The School therefore recognises that immediate action must be taken to rectify these deficiencies and ensure that we are compliant with all University reporting requirements.

The School is now seeking to address the issues identified through the amendment of our engagement and attendance monitoring procedures and through the enforcement of our procedure for requesting and recording leave of absences. This report therefore details the actions that we are taking to ensure that all Postgraduate Research (PGR) students receive adequate pastoral support and that the School meets all UKVI compliance requirements. This report is accompanied by an updated policy document, for which IGS seeks Strategy Committee approval.

Points of Contact

The Tier 4 Student Attendance and Engagement Policy stipulates that each school must identify a minimum of ten points of contact throughout the academic year (at no greater than 60 day intervals), which must involve a mixture of both '*attendance*' and '*engagement*' points. Attendance points are those created by central services, engagement points are created by the School. The attendance points that are recorded by Student Administration are the confirmation of attendance element of matriculation and four census points. Each School must then identify a number of engagement points to make this up to the requisite ten contact points overall.

The School previously identified four engagement points for PGR students, which corresponded to significant progress points in a student's programme of studies and were therefore based on numbered rather than named months. While these points were spread throughout the academic year, we recognise that we did not record enough engagement points and in some instances there was longer than 60 days between a scheduled census point and an engagement point, breaching reporting requirements and hindering any issues being dealt with in a timely manner.

The School will therefore now increase the number of engagement points that are recorded each year from four to six to ensure that a minimum of ten points of contact is maintained overall. Additionally, the engagement points will now be anchored to named months, rather than numbered months, to ensure that engagement is recorded at short and regular intervals. This should make non-engagement more apparent and ensure that any escalation required for missed engagement points will result in issues being addressed at the earliest opportunity.

Therefore, the following contact points will now be recorded and monitored for all PGR students in the School of Informatics:

Contact point	Month	Description	Event Type	Recorded by
1	September	IGS Check-in	Engagement	School - IGS
2	October	Census	Attendance	Student Administration
3	November	Meeting with supervisor	Engagement	School - Supervisor
4	January	Census	Attendance	Student Administration
5	February	Meeting with supervisor	Engagement	School - Supervisor
6	March	Census	Attendance	Student Administration
7	April	Meeting with supervisor	Engagement	School - Supervisor
8	June	Meeting with supervisor	Engagement	School - Supervisor
9	July	Census	Attendance	Student Administration
10	August	Meeting with supervisor	Engagement	School - Supervisor

NB: The engagement points may be undertaken by face-to-face contact or via electronic media (e.g. Skype, emails, electronic submissions), if required.

Recording responsibilities

An email will be sent on the 1st of the month with a reminder that an engagement point must be entered into EUCLID by the 28th of the month. This will be entered into EUCLID via the "Engagement" tab by either the Informatics Graduate School (IGS) or the Principal/Co-Lead Supervisor and the following will be recorded:

- Event type (meeting or other);
- Event description (the name of the engagement point, as above);
- Event date;
- Organiser (supervisor or IGS);
- Engaged (yes, no or exempt); and,
- Notes

The 'notes' field must contain a minimum of two sentences explaining the details of the engagement point. Supervisors must not report or upload any confidential information/documents.

Reviewing attendance and escalation

The School previously operated a two-stage escalation process, with the Graduate School Office following up on the first missed engagement point before escalating to the Deputy Director of Graduate School for the second. However, it has been noted that the School had not responded to problems in a timely manner and had not recorded escalation procedures followed on the student's record, contravening the Tier 4 Student Attendance and Engagement Policy.

Therefore, we will now:

- ensure that all actions taken to follow up with missed engagement points are recorded on the student's EUCLID record
- add a third escalation point including the Director of Graduate School in this process to ensure that our monitoring processes are robust and transparent, and that firm action can be taken when needed without delay.

The School will therefore follow the procedure outlined below for monitoring and following up on missed engagement points.

- Attendance information recorded by Student Administration and engagement information entered by IGS/supervisors into EUCLID will be refreshed daily in the BI Suite.
- A nominated Administrator within the Graduate School Office (with support from other members of the team where required) will run a report on the 1st of each month to combine the information about attendance and engagement points met by each Tier 4 student in the previous month and identify any missed contact points.
- If an engagement point has been missed, an email will be sent to student and supervisor, notifying them that they have missed a compulsory engagement point and requesting that either the student reports to the Graduate School Office or the student and supervisor arrange a supervision meeting at the earliest opportunity, as appropriate. The Graduate School Office will add a note to the student's record to confirm that a reminder has been sent.
- If two consecutive engagement points are missed, an email will be sent to the student, supervisor and Deputy Director of Graduate School to request a reason and to explain the implications of missing engagement points. The Graduate School Office will add a note to the student's record to confirm that this has now been escalated.
- If three consecutive engagement points are missed, an email will be sent to the student, supervisor and Director of Graduate School to outline that the School has concerns and that they should meet urgently to discuss on-course engagement. It will be highlighted that the student will be reported for non-engagement if action is not taken. The Graduate School Office will add a note to the student's record to confirm that this has been escalated further.
- If it is then deemed that a student is no longer engaged with their programme and/or attending the University, the School will follow the College procedures for reporting Non-Attendance.

NB: This escalation process is subject to change, in alignment with any future changes to the University and College escalation process.

Leave of absence

In addition to recording attendance and engagement, the University is also required to report any changes to location of studies and therefore it is important that procedures are in place within the School to keep accurate records of approved leave of absences.

For periods of absence of less than two weeks, the School requires the student to agree the leave with their supervisor and the supervisor must send a leave of absence request form to the Graduate School Office to keep on file. For absences of 2 weeks to 15 months, supervisors must submit a leave of absence request form with the relevant details for approval by the Deputy Director of Graduate School. Once this request has been approved, the Graduate School Office writes out to the student and supervisor to confirm. The School will undertake to reinforce this procedure by communicating this again to all supervisors and including this in supervisor briefing sessions. Supervisors will also be

reminded that engagement monitoring is expected to continue during any leave of absence. Additionally, students and supervisors will now be advised that any claims for expenses incurred during a period of leave will be reviewed by the Graduate School Directorate if a leave of absence was not approved prior to the student leaving Edinburgh.

However, in the case highlighted, it was noted that the School did not record that the student was no longer in Edinburgh on their student record. As this is a compliance requirement and allows the University to report any changes to location of studies, the School will therefore ensure that any approved leave of absence requests of 30 days or more are recorded on the student's record and to this end the Graduate School Office will submit a programme change request with the details via the applicant hub on EUCLID upon receipt of an approved request. The Graduate School Office will also review current leave of absences to ensure that all recording requirements have been met.

There are additional requirements for PhD students undertaking a placement during their studies, which must be followed in order to comply with UKVI regulations. These are explained in the School's policy on PhD placements for Tier 4 students.

If the requested leave of absence is for 15 months or longer, the School will follow the College procedure for requesting the leave.

Period of leave	Action
Up to 2 weeks	Approved by supervisor
2 weeks to 30 days	Must be approved by the Deputy Head of Graduate School
30 days to 15 months	Must be approved by the College Postgraduate Studies Committee

In conclusion, the School of Informatics is taking immediate action to ensure that the situation highlighted with this PhD student is not repeated by increasing the number of engagement points we record for our PGR students, tightening our review and escalation process to ensure that issues are identified earlier and dealt with in a timely manner, ensuring that our leave of absence request procedure is adhered to, and ensuring that all pertinent information about engagement is fully documented on the student's record. The School hopes that these changes will sufficiently address the concerns raised and ensure both that students receive excellent pastoral support and that UKVI compliance requirements are met. We will also endeavour to review these procedures on a regular basis to ensure that they remain sufficient.

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