

# Academic Engagement Policy

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## Academic Engagement Policy

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## Introduction

1. Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes and study contact points as required by Northeastern University London (the University). Students must be fully academically engaged in order to successfully complete the full programme of study. The University monitors the engagement of all enrolled students. The University considers a student academically engaged if they are actively and consistently following their programme of study.
2. The University has a responsibility to its students and to external bodies to ensure that students are attending and studying, so as to comply with the relevant regulatory requirements, and the University's requirements.

## Purpose

3. This Policy sets out how the University supports students to engage fully with their studies, what the University expects of students in relation to engagement with their programmes, how it will monitor that engagement, and what it will do where students are not engaging.

## Scope

4. This Policy is for all students who are attending Northeastern University London (the University) on a Student Visa. For the purposes of this Policy, 'student' shall refer to these students only.
5. Students or learners who are not on a Student Visa should follow their respective attendance policies, such as the:
  - 5.1. [Undergraduate Student Attendance Policy](#).

## Compliance With the Policy

6. UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) has clearly stated in the Student Sponsor Guidance that, where the student fails to re-engage with their studies within 60 days of the first contact regarding their academic engagement, the University must withdraw sponsorship except in exceptional circumstances.
7. For the purposes of this Policy, any student who has not reached 70% academic engagement of key events (study contact points) without approval shall be regarded as having unsatisfactory engagement with their programme.
8. Exceptional circumstances are rare, for example, a serious illness or injury. However, the University still expects that the student informs the University as soon as they possibly can.

9. Where a sponsored visa student fails to meet the minimum requirements as set out in this Policy, the University will record the reason for the lack of academic engagement, any evidence (if applicable) and the steps taken to ensure the student re-engages with their study.

## Definition of a Study Contact Point

10. A 'study contact point' for the purposes of academic engagement monitoring constitutes an engagement by the student at any single timetabled activity within a one-week period of timetabled activities.
11. Timetabled activities include lectures, seminars, and tutorials as published by the Timetabling Department. Any activity that is not timetabled and, therefore, will not appear on students' Individual Student Timetables, will not be considered and recorded as a study contact point.
12. A timetabled week or a standard teaching week is defined as Monday to Friday. Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students' timetabled activities are recorded. Postgraduate research students' monthly supervisions and formal reviews are recorded.
13. Examples of a study contact point include but are not limited to:
  - 13.1. Registration with the University.
  - 13.2. A lecture, tutorial, seminar or lab session.
  - 13.3. Study visits or any trip outside the University.
  - 13.4. Confirmation of a supervisory meeting.
  - 13.5. An examination.
  - 13.6. An oral examination (including viva).
  - 13.7. Submitting summative or formative coursework.
  - 13.8. In interim dissertation, coursework or report.
  - 13.9. Any in-person or online progress review with a member of faculty (Collections) or member of professional staff.
14. Some study contact points may not be recorded in CELCAT but are recorded in other systems.

## Monitoring Academic Engagement

15. Registers are generated based on timetabled events. The Visa Compliance Team monitors individual student academic engagement on a weekly basis.

16. The [Student Welfare Policy](#) sets out how the University will monitor all students' attendance and engagement, and the interventions that will be made to support students experiencing difficulties. Where necessary, the Student Welfare Policy runs parallel to the Academic Engagement Policy to ensure that students are supported while simultaneously ensuring compliance with UKVI requirements.

## Academic Engagement Monitoring Process – Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Degree Programmes

17. This section applies to all undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes taught or delivered at the University.
18. The Visa Compliance Office monitors student academic engagement on a weekly basis.
19. A register is generated weekly by the Visa Compliance Officer (VCO). Any student with two, four, or six consecutive weeks, or a demonstrable pattern, of academic engagement below 70% is identified and contacted via email.
20. The following actions are expected when a lack of academic engagement is identified:
  - 20.1. Stage One will be triggered where a student has less than 70% academic engagement in the consecutive two weeks.
  - 20.2. Stage Two will be triggered where a student has less than 70% academic engagement in the consecutive four weeks or a demonstrable pattern of non-academic engagement causing concern.
  - 20.3. Stage Three will be triggered where a student has less than 70% academic engagement in the consecutive six weeks or a demonstrable pattern of non-academic engagement causing concern.
  - 20.4. Stage Four will be triggered if the student fails to improve academic engagement following Stage Three. Sponsorship will be withdrawn, and the student will have seven days to appeal against the Stage 4 decision.

### Stage One

21. The student will be contacted via email if they have less than 70% academic engagement in consecutive two weeks or a demonstrable pattern of non-engagement causing concern.
22. The student will be sent an attendance Stage One warning via email.

### Stage Two

23. If the student has less than 70% academic engagement in consecutive four weeks or a demonstrable pattern of non-engagement causing concern, the student will be invited to attend a Stage Two Engagement Hearing with the Visa Compliance Officer (VCO) and an Academic Adviser, who will advise from an academic support perspective.
24. If the student attends the hearing and the University is satisfied with the student's reasons and/or the evidence provided, the student's absences will be considered authorised. A verbal warning may still be issued to the student, but no further action is required.
25. If the student attends the hearing but fails to provide valid reasons or evidence, they will be asked to read and sign the Stage Two Declaration.
26. If the student fails to communicate or attend the hearing, they will be telephoned by the VCO.

### Stage Three

27. If the student has less than 70% academic engagement in the consecutive six weeks or a demonstrable pattern of non-academic engagement causing concern, they will be invited for a Stage Three Engagement Hearing with the Visa & Immigration Compliance Manager (VICM) and a senior member of the Academic Advising team or a senior member of Registry.
28. If the student attends the hearing and the VICM and a senior member of the Academic Advising team or a senior member of Registry are satisfied with the student's reasons and/or evidence provided, the student's absences will be considered authorised. A verbal warning may still be issued to the student, but no further action is required.
29. If the student attends the hearing but fails to provide valid reasons and/or evidence, they will be asked to read and sign the Stage Three Declaration.
30. If the student fails to communicate or attend the hearing, then the VICM will telephone the student, inform a member of the Executive Committee, and the case will progress to Stage Four.

### Stage Four - Withdrawal of Sponsorship

31. If the student has failed to communicate or respond at Stage Three, no additional insight regarding the student's situation has been obtained, and/or the student has less than 70% academic engagement in the consecutive seven weeks or a demonstrable pattern of non-academic engagement causing concern, the student sponsorship will be withdrawn and reported to the UKVI.

32. For information about appeals against the withdrawal decision, please refer to the section on [Appeals](#).

## Academic Engagement Monitoring Process - Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes

33. This section of the Policy applies to all research degree programme students on a Student Visa at the University.
34. Postgraduate research students are required to attend all scheduled study contact points. It is expected that all students will travel to the University to engage with their research or for any face-to-face learning sessions, including supervisory meetings, training courses, or any other study contact points. Remote engagement of any scheduled study contact point will only be permitted where a request has been made and approved, including during the writing-up period.
35. If a student is unable to attend a scheduled study contact point, they must notify the University and obtain authorisation as per this Policy. The University reserves the right to withdraw a student's visa sponsorship and withdraw them from the program in the case of non-compliance with this Policy.

### Research Away from the University

36. If a postgraduate research student plans to conduct research or collect data away from the University for more than four weeks, they must make an application for Authorised Research Leave. In-person engagement is not expected for students who are on Authorised Research Leave. Monthly confirmation of engagement via electronic means such as email and virtual meetings is acceptable during this period.

### Engagement Monitoring Period

37. Postgraduate research students are subject to this Policy from the point of registration until the date they are advised by Registry that they have been awarded a qualification or they are withdrawn from the programme.

### Term/Off-Term Time Period

38. Research degree programmes are considered to run continuously and are not confined to the teaching semesters. However, there is no monitoring of engagement during term breaks or during any other bank holidays.

### Stage One

39. Students who are absent without authorisation for a consecutive 30 days will be asked to attend a mandatory Stage One Engagement Hearing with the Director of the Doctoral School and the VICM. The student will be required to present evidence or a valid reason related to their absence. It

is at the discretion of the Director of the Doctoral School and the VICM to determine if the evidence or reasons provided are valid and acceptable.

40. An invitation will be sent to the student via email by the Visa Compliance Team.
41. During the hearing, academic engagement (including attendance) will be discussed and reviewed in detail to determine if the absence can be authorised and/or if the student can successfully complete their program by the expected end date.
42. If the student attends the hearing and the University is satisfied with the student's reasons and/or evidence provided, the student's absences will be considered authorised. A verbal warning may still be issued to the student, but no further action is required.
43. If the student attends the hearing but fails to provide valid reasons and/or evidence to explain their absences, they will be asked to read and sign the Stage One Declaration.
44. If the student fails to communicate or attend the hearing, then they will be telephoned by the VICM.

### Stage Two

45. Students who are absent without authorisation for 60 consecutive days will be asked to attend a mandatory Stage Two Academic Engagement Hearing with the Director of Visa Compliance and the Director of the Doctoral School.
46. An invitation will be sent to the student via email as well as an attempt to contact the student via phone by the Visa Compliance Team.
47. If the student attends the hearing and provides satisfactory reasons and/or evidence for their absences, the absences will be considered authorised. The student may receive a verbal warning, but no further action will be required.
48. If the student attends the hearing but fails to provide a valid reason and/or evidence for their unauthorised absences, the case will progress to Stage Three – Withdrawal of Sponsorship.
49. If the student fails to attend the hearing or communicate within 10 days, the case will progress to Stage Three – Withdrawal of Sponsorship.

### Stage Three - Withdrawal of Sponsorship

50. At the withdrawal stage, the University will withdraw its visa sponsorship and remove the student from their enrolled programme if they have 60 consecutive days of unauthorised absence.



51. For information about appeals against the withdrawal decision, please refer to the section on [Appeals](#).

## Appeals

52. The student will be given ten calendar days to appeal against the withdrawal decision. Appeals against the withdrawal decision are made via email to [Appeals](#), and must include the grounds for appeal.
53. In their email, the student should fully explain their grounds for appeal, such as lack of engagement with the procedure, and students are expected to provide evidence to support their appeal.
54. The Director of Visa Compliance will review the appeal with one member of the Executive Committee, other than the Executive Committee included at Stage Three of the procedure, and a designate from the Office of the Provost (for students who are on the study-abroad option only).
55. The appeal can be dismissed or upheld. This decision is final.
56. If the student appeals and the appeal is upheld by the University, then the student will be allowed to continue their studies subject to UKVI approval.
57. If the appeal is upheld but the UKVI refuses to reinstate the student's sponsorship, then the University may assign a new CAS to the student so that they can make a new Student Visa application from their home country (provided the remaining programme length is more than six months or the student cannot complete their remaining programme from overseas). The student must leave the UK within 60 days from the date of withdrawal of sponsorship.

## Absence Reporting

58. A student who is absent through illness or any other extenuating circumstances must notify the University as soon as possible via the [Student Absence Reporting Form](#) and provide appropriate evidence. In the event that a student's engagement falls below the required standard, reported absences may be authorised where the VCO is satisfied the absence was reported in good time and appropriate evidence was provided. Where the VCO is not satisfied with the reason for absence, then the VCO will follow the relevant Academic Engagement Monitoring Process.
  - 58.1. Evidence may take various forms; but must be sufficiently detailed to support the narrative provided by the student.

- 58.2. Evidence needs to be in English, or translated by a professional translator if not in English.
- 58.3. Acceptable forms of evidence to support a student's reported absence includes, but is not limited to:
- 58.3.1. Medical Evidence from a UK provider (e.g hospital note, medical certificate, note from a health care worker, formal notification of a hospital or clinic appointment).
  - 58.3.2. Medical Evidence from an overseas healthcare provider for an ongoing condition.
  - 58.3.3. Evidence of transport cancellation or delays.
  - 58.3.4. A report from a University department in support of your absence.
  - 58.3.5. A Police note.
  - 58.3.6. Notice of death or marriage.
  - 58.3.7. Notice of Jury Service.
- 58.4. Evidence not accepted includes, but is not limited to:
- 58.4.1. Medical Evidence from an overseas healthcare provider for a short-term illness while you are based in London.
  - 58.4.2. Photos of an injury or medication.
- 58.5. Circumstances which will not result in an authorisation of absence includes, but is not limited to:
- 58.5.1. Oversleeping or missing a bus/train.
  - 58.5.2. Demands of employment.
  - 58.5.3. Personal travel, such as holidays.
  - 58.5.4. Missing a contact point where reasonable prior notice had been given of a change to the timetable.
59. Where a student has a significant illness or other extenuating circumstances, which will mean that they will be absent for more than one week of teaching, they should take the following steps:
- 59.1. Complete the [Student Absence Reporting Form](#).
  - 59.2. Notify the [Visa Compliance Team](#) and seek advice to ensure that they remain compliant with the conditions of their visa.
  - 59.3. Notify their Academic Adviser.

## Academic Engagement During Dissertation Period

60. Normally, there are between three to five supervised study contact points during the dissertation period.
61. Supervised study contact points are recorded and monitored for the students writing their dissertation.
62. Stage Two warning process will be triggered should the student fail to attend the first monthly study contact point.
63. Stage Four withdrawal process will be triggered should the student fail to attend the second monthly study contact point and fail to establish any contact between the Stage Two and Stage Four time period.

## Short-Term Off-Campus Academic Engagement

64. The University recognises that exceptional circumstances, such as personal or close family member health situations, may impact students' ability to engage in any learning activities on campus for a short period of time.
65. Students may apply to the University to request off-campus learning for a short period of time and must consult with the Visa Compliance Team as soon as they are aware of the situation so they can be supported.
66. Requests for the short-term off-campus academic engagement will be considered in the following circumstances:
  - 66.1. Serious short-term illness or accident that may affect the student's ability to attend on campus (medical evidence is required).
  - 66.2. Bereavement (death of a close family member - a death certificate or medical evidence is required).
  - 66.3. An accident abroad that may affect the student's ability to return during the term time (medical evidence is required).
  - 66.4. Any other exceptional circumstances that may affect the student's ability to attend the University in person for a short period of time. Such circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis (official documentation relevant to the event is required, which may include court or legal papers).
67. Please note, all evidence submitted must be provided in English. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that supporting evidence is accompanied by certified translations. In exceptional circumstances, such

as a bereavement, the student should submit their request as soon as possible and the application will be reviewed in anticipation of the receipt of the supporting evidence. The evidence supplied will be stored securely, on the student's file, and only relevant staff will have access.

68. The Visa Compliance Team will carefully look at the student's application before making a decision. If the circumstances are deemed valid by the Visa Compliance Team, and the student's supporting evidence is approved, the student will be allowed academic engagement off-campus for a short period of time. Normally, a two-week period will be granted and if more time is required, the student will need to speak to the Visa Compliance Team regarding an extension to their short-term off-campus period.
69. If the circumstances are not deemed valid by the Visa Compliance Team, the student will be notified of the outcome and the rationale behind the decision. It is essential for the University to maintain a record of student engagement to remain compliant with the sponsor licence agreement and in order to do this, the University will require evidence to support the application. The evidence submitted will be stored on the student's file, in Quercus, with restricted access. Only staff that need to review the application for approval will be able to access the documents. The information will remain confidential.

## Student Accommodation Distance Requirements

70. The University has established a maximum allowable distance between student accommodation and the University campus to ensure that students can easily attend scheduled study contact points and remain academically engaged with their programme of study.
71. Students should be able to easily commute to and from their place of residence in the UK to the Devon House campus. Students should consider their capacity to travel to the campus, additional travelling time, effects of the personal circumstances of the student, including personal commitments and responsibilities.
72. All students must ensure that their contact details, including UK residential address, are up to date on their Quercus file at all times.

## Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Degree Students

73. All students studying on a taught degree programme must reside within a 30-mile radius of Devon House throughout the registration period and dissertation period, as applicable.

74. This excludes students who are studying away from the University on an official University programme in which the student is studying at another Northeastern University campus overseas.

## Postgraduate Research Students

75. Postgraduate Research students should reside within a reasonable commuting distance from Devon House unless they have an approved research leave period.

## Extenuating Circumstances

76. Where a student is unable to meet this requirement due to extenuating circumstances, they will need to submit a formal request which should include evidence (where appropriate), and a proposal as to how they plan to attend all scheduled contact points on campus, in writing to the Visa Compliance Team within two weeks of enrolment, or from the date they have moved to this new accommodation if they move residence during the semester.
77. The Visa Compliance Team will review the request within 14 days of submission and give the outcome of the review in writing to the student. In exceptional circumstances, the request will be granted.
78. Where a request is rejected, the student will need to meet the student accommodation distance set out in this policy and ensure that they attend all scheduled contact points on campus.

## Support to Study Policy and Procedure to Re-Engage Students

79. The University has a policy in place to ensure students are provided with full support and advice for academic re-engagement as per their individual circumstances and according to the [Support to Study Policy and Procedure](#).

## Study Deferral Request

80. The University must notify the UKVI and withdraw sponsorship where a student has deferred their studies for more than 60 days, unless exceptional circumstances as set out in the UKVI Policy guidance related to academic engagement “Changes to student circumstances table” apply.

## Study Deferral - Exceptional Circumstances A

81. The University may continue to sponsor a student who has deferred their studies for up to a maximum of 60 days providing the University feels confident that it can continue to carry out its sponsorship duties and the student will be able to complete their programme within their existing period of leave. If the University considers the student will not resume their studies after 60 days, the University will withdraw sponsorship.

### **Study Deferral - Exceptional Circumstances B**

82. In exceptional circumstances, such as serious illness or injury, the University may continue to sponsor a student for longer than 60 days, provided the student can still complete their programme within their existing period of leave when they resume their studies. It is for the University to decide whether it is prepared to continue sponsoring a student during a deferral and has the documentary evidence to support this decision to the UKVI compliance officers.

### **Study Abroad (Northeastern University London Undergraduate Students)**

83. Undergraduate degree programme students may go to another Northeastern University campus abroad to study and then return to Northeastern University London to complete their remaining undergraduate degree programme. The University will continue to comply with its sponsorship duties, including academic engagement monitoring, while students are studying abroad as they remain under its sponsorship.

## Version History

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