University of Essex

Student Engagement Policy

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Policy Context

1. The University of Essex delivers a transformational education to our students and puts their success at the heart of our mission, supporting every student from every background to achieve outstanding outcomes, and nurturing our community of educators to support and promote student success. In supporting our students to achieve, we work in partnership with them to enable them to take an active role in their engagement with their studies, underpinned by the responsible use of data to provide the broadest picture of individual student engagement. Our purpose is to enable meaningful interventions and to provide effective support arrangements.

Policy coverage, aims and principles

2. The Student Engagement Policy ("the policy") establishes an institutional framework for our approach towards taught student engagement with their studies.

3. For the purposes of the policy, taught students are defined as all undergraduate and postgraduate students undertaking taught modules or courses. This includes postgraduate research students who may be undertaking taught modules as part of their programme of study.

4. The purpose of the policy is to maximise the success and achievement of every student through a structured approach based on support and mutual decision-making to enable timely and impactful interventions.

5. While providing a structure for the management and response to student engagement, the policy recognises the importance of:

   ▪ personal contact alongside the use of data
   ▪ a focus on support for students
   ▪ flexibility in approach to respond to individual student needs and behaviour

6. The policy is underpinned by five principles:

   ▪ An approach to monitoring and responding to student engagement that is driven, and seen to be driven, by support and advice to succeed
   ▪ Visibility and a shared understanding across the institution of student engagement and the impact of our interventions
   ▪ Personalised interventions and mutually agreed solutions for students as far as possible, tailored to individual needs and circumstances to support students to be active participants in their education and academic progress
   ▪ Parity of experience for all our students regardless of academic discipline or Department through the establishment of clear institutional expectations both of the University and of our students in managing student engagement

- Resource deployment that focuses on effectiveness, efficiency and is targeted in support of student success.

7. The policy recognises that there are many single or combined factors[1] that may affect students' engagement with their academic studies and/or their personal circumstances. The policy seeks to enable us to identify and understand these factors and to intervene in order to provide appropriate support to facilitate our students' success and development to thrive in their future lives.

Monitoring student engagement

8. Students are active partners in their education. They are expected to engage fully in the full range of academic activities and are expected to attend and engage with all timetabled teaching events and other scheduled activities.

9. Taught student engagement is measured primarily through the data available in the Learner Activity Engagement Portal (LEAP), which provides a broad picture of engagement across a range of education activities at individual and cohort levels, combined with other data and knowledge, including academic marks and interactions with personal tutors and academic and professional services colleagues. LEAP is not the sole method of monitoring engagement, which is also undertaken through a variety of formal and informal means.

10. LEAP creates a daily engagement rating for students based on their academic activity in relation to attendance at teaching (both in person and online), use of Moodle, FASER, Listen Again and PC Logins. The system establishes the following engagement ratings for individual students: Very Low, Low, Partial, Good and High. The ratings are used to determine the appropriate action and interventions required to understand why a student may not be engaging and advise them of the support that can be offered.

11. Data collected, stored and analysed in the implementation of this policy are managed in accordance with the Ethical Use of Data Policy and the data protection principles and approach defined in Appendix A. The University is committed to using student data in ways that are ethical, beneficial, legal and proportionate. The University's approach is transparent to students and all students have access to their own individual engagement data. Monitoring data according to this policy is set out in the student privacy notice at www.essex.ac.uk/student/my-essex/privacy-notice-students

Supporting student engagement

12. Academic Departments and Schools ('Departments') are responsible for monitoring, understanding and maximising the engagement of their students with their studies and for taking proactive steps

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[1] For example, these factors could include but are not exclusively academic-related, health, financial, caring or other responsibilities and/or personal relationships.

where there is evidence of lower engagement than expected. Departments engage with data available to them, encourage a culture of student engagement, undertake regular reviews of data and contact students to offer support. Arrangements for courses with a Professional Code of Conduct or other additional engagement requirements are managed by the relevant Departments and Schools alongside this policy, which provides an institutional framework.

13. Departments are supported in the work to monitor the engagement of their students and with the operation of the policy through advice and guidance provided by central Professional Services teams, including the Student Progress team, Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service and those providing data analysis.

14. Decisions in relation to referral for further action to support engagement are taken in conjunction with broader data and knowledge about a student's academic progress.

15. The policy's referral process does not prevent intervention at other points in the academic year for students where engagement levels may drop or for options to be discussed to facilitate an appropriate decision to be made for an individual student. Monitoring continues for all students throughout the year to enable meaningful interventions to support student success.

16. All taught students are monitored to measure the engagement with their studies. Where there are concerns about a student's engagement, there are normally three stages of intervention and referral during the Autumn and Spring terms.

Courses with different entry and continuation points

17. Where a student undertakes a programme of study with a different entry point during the academic year or academic structure, an equivalent process to monitor early engagement is managed by the Department or School to enable students to be referred in line with the principles of the stages of the policy and for support to be offered. These arrangements are agreed in discussion with the Academic Registrar or nominee.

Stage 1: Early engagement

Weeks 1 to 5: Weekly Review

In the first five weeks of the Autumn term, Departments monitor the engagement of all students at least once a week to identify and contact students identified as having very low or low engagement. A small group of staff in each Department, including both academic and professional services staff, meet weekly in the crucial early engagement period to determine which students they will contact to understand why they are not engaging and to offer support.

The guidance provided to Departments in line with paragraph 27 of the policy includes a framework for the actions to be taken during weeks 1-5, covering: Week, Cohort/Year Group, Data to Review, Criteria for Contact and Recommended Type of Contact.

In the early weeks of the autumn term, Departments prioritise the following specific categories of students for contact if their engagement falls into the low or very low categories:

- Students that are repeating a year or returning after a lengthy period away (including intermission, placements or Study Abroad, reassessment out of residence)
- Students that are known to the Department as having experienced problems in previous years
- Students who have joined the University through clearing
- Students who are studying at Foundation year or Stage 1
- Students who have changed course
- Students who have declared conditions that may result in additional support requirements

Weeks 6 to 11: Fortnightly Review

From week 6, Departments undertake fortnightly reviews, along with discussions with students through the scheduled Personal Tutor meetings, to ensure that all taught students who are not engaging with their studies are identified. The guidance provided to Departments in line with paragraph 27 of the policy includes a framework for the actions to be taken during weeks 6-11, covering: Week, Cohort/Year Group, Data to Review, Criteria for Contact and Recommended Type of Contact.

Stage 2: Referral for support

18. By 1 December in the autumn term, the Department undertakes the following actions and all students with low or very low engagement and/or where concerns remain about the student's academic progress are referred to the Student Progress team for contact and support:

- Contact has been made with the student
- The student has met their Personal Tutor and/or the Departmental Progress Officer

19. The Student Progress team contacts the students to confirm they have been identified as having low engagement with their studies. The purpose of the contact is to identify and understand the reasons for the low engagement and to offer routes to solution and support, including signposting and/or referring a student to another support service or referral for action under another policy or procedure. Where appropriate, the team works in partnership with the Department(s) to remove barriers to engagement for the individual student.

Stage 3: Supported decision-making

20. The Student Progress team monitors the engagement of students referred for support under stage 2. Where a student's engagement does not improve following referral at stage 2, in March of the Spring term, the Student Progress team offers the student a formal choice of three options, which are set out

below, noting that these options may be discussed at any stage during the escalation process to facilitate the best outcome for the student:

- Continuation in the current year of study

- Intermission

- Voluntary withdrawal, including the option to transfer to another higher education institution

21. The student is required to make the decision during the Spring term in line with relevant regulations and to take account of assessment requirements and other factors. The student is supported in making the decision through the provision of relevant information, including the financial and academic implications of each option, and access to relevant support services.

22. Where a student decides to continue in the current year of study, they are informed of the academic implications of proceeding with continued low engagement, and they are referred back to their Department for support by their Personal Tutor as a priority during the Spring and Summer terms. If other support requirements are identified at this point, the student is signposted appropriately.

23. For students who do not engage with the stages of referral for further action and support, the default position is that they remain a student and any decision about their academic progression is determined by the Board of Examiners as per our standard procedures. Support continues to be offered by the Department throughout the academic year, working with central Professional Services teams where appropriate.

Exceptional withdrawal through lack of engagement

24. In cases where (i) there has been zero or minimal engagement from a student either with their studies or in response to contact for support; and/or (ii) there is evidence taking all the facts into account that a student has disengaged from their studies, a recommendation may be made exceptionally to the Academic Registrar or nominee, who will have the authority to withdraw the student from the University. In such cases, the student will be notified in advance of the recommendation to the Academic Registrar. Where the recommendation to withdraw a student is approved, the student will be notified and a final deadline set by which they may request to remain a student. Where the student requests to continue with their studies, the case will be considered under stage 3 of the policy and appropriate options considered.

Policy Guidance

25. The policy is accompanied by a range of guidance materials relating to student engagement to support its operation, including information for students, Personal Tutors, Departments and in relation to the LEAP system. The guidance is updated annually by the Student Progress team in conjunction with stakeholders, including students, to support enhancement and to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Analysis and monitoring

26. An annual report of the operation of the policy is provided to Senate and its relevant sub-committees at the end of each academic year, including analysis of the impact of the policy in supporting student success and trends in institutional performance.

27. The Education Committee provides institutional oversight for the use, deployment and impact of LEAP and the focus on the use and understanding of data to support student achievement. There is appropriate reporting to the University Steering Group and Senate.

Policy review and oversight

28. On behalf of the University Senate, the Academic Registrar is responsible for ensuring that the policy operates effectively and is reviewed appropriately and remains fit for purpose in meeting its aims and supporting the University's mission.

29. On behalf of the Academic Registrar, the Senior Student Progress Manager co-ordinates all aspects of the administration and operational delivery of the policy across all University campuses, providing a focal point for operational management for activities associated with the policy and in partnership with Departments.

30. The policy is reviewed annually by the Academic Registrar or nominee in conjunction with stakeholders, including students. Any proposed changes are considered by the Education Committee and recommended to Senate for approval.

APPENDIX A

Data protection and student engagement

The University is subject to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Legal basis for processing information

The University requires a legal basis for processing personal data. In most cases attendance data is collected as necessary for the performance of its contract with you as a student.

In some cases the University may be subject to a legal obligation to provide attendance data to a third party, such as the Home Office.

In an emergency situation where a student's vital interests are at stake, data may be shared with a medical professional or emergency contact.

Where the University holds student ethnicity data in reference to student absence information, it does so as part of its legal obligations under the Equality Act. Ethnicity data will only be used for aggregated analysis to allow us to monitor outcomes and plan for future policy decisions. Students will not be identified as part of this analysis or be subject to any individual intervention. As ethnicity data is special category data, the University requires an additional legal basis to process the data (Article 9 (2) (b)) our obligations under Equality law) and a Substantial Public Interest Condition from the Data Protection Act 2018, Schedule 1 (2) (8), 'Equality of Opportunity of Treatment'.

Sharing data with third parties

The University may, in certain circumstances, provide attendance data to a third party. In all cases the University will only provide the minimum of data necessary for the purposes of the sharing. Examples of this type of sharing includes:

- The Home Office, where the provision attendance information is a condition of a visa application.
- The NHS or professional accreditation bodies, where they are funding the course or attendance reporting is a necessary part of the programme of study
- National Embassies, where a student is being sponsored or has given permission for the Embassy to be updated
- The Police, where a formal investigation requires provision of data and an exemption in the Data Protection Act 2018 applies

Where the student wishes to share information

Students may wish to share their attendance data with third parties for a variety of reasons- for example in order to support a job application, a legal claim or other process, or to allow a parent, guardian, supporter or legal representative to discuss an issue regarding their attendance on their behalf. If students wish their data to be shared in this way they must supply written authorisation, setting out what information may be shared, the contact details of the person or people the information is to be shared with, and the period over which the information is to be shared.

The rights of data subjects

Students can have a number of rights under the GDPR in regard to their data, with full details on how to use this at the University's Privacy Hub https://www.essex.ac.uk/disclaimer/privacy-statements As stated elsewhere in the policy, all students have access to their attendance data through the LEAP portal. Former students may request their attendance data under the subject access right.

Automated profiling

Whilst the University's LEAP system creates a daily engagement rating, the University does not use that rating alone for the purposes of an intervention or a decision made in relation to a student's studies. It highlights where a relevant member of staff can investigate in more detail the student's engagement in line with this policy. Therefore, the use of data is not "a decision based solely on automated processing", as defined in Article 22 of the GDPR.

Statistical purposes

Aggregated statistical data, where the figures cannot be used to identify any individuals, will be shared across the University to help monitor outcomes and provide evidence for future decision making. Statistics may also be shared in response to requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Data retention

In accordance with the University's records retention schedules, attendance data, whether paper or electronic, is stored for 6 years after the completion of studies.

Title	**Student Engagement Policy**
Policy Classification	Policy
Security Classification	Open
Security Rationale	
Policy Manager Role	Senior Student Progress Manager
Nominated Contact	Student Progress Manager (Engagement) studentprogress@essex.ac.uk
Responsible UoE Section	Academic Section
Approval Body	Senate
Signed Off Date	September 2020
Publication Status	Published
Published Date	1 October 2020
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Review Date	04 July 2023
Related Publications	■ General Regulations, Academic Conduct (.pdf) ■ Late submission of Coursework ■ Extenuating Circumstances ■ Charter, Statutes and Ordinances ■ University Regulations ■ Learner Activity Engagement Portal (LEAP) ■ Professional Codes of Conduct
Stakeholders	Academic Registrar Senior Student Progress Manager Student Progress Manager (Engagement) Departments & Schools, including Heads of Department, Departmental Managers and Directors of Education Faculty Deans (both Undergraduate and Postgraduate)

Title	**Student Engagement Policy**
	Professional Services teams Faculty Managers
UoE Identifier	0030

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