

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT



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1. Preamble

- 1.1 Student engagement is central to academic success, wellbeing, and progression, and underpins the University's commitment to supporting every student to achieve their full potential. This Code of Practice on Student Academic Engagement is applicable to all registered students, at all levels (foundation, undergraduate, postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research), and is designed to promote a shared understanding of what meaningful academic engagement looks like throughout the student journey. Meaningful academic engagement not only supports academic progress but also contributes to a more rewarding and confident student experience.
- 1.2 Academic engagement refers to a student's active and consistent participation in their programme of study or research. This includes attending scheduled learning and teaching sessions such as, but not limited to, lectures, seminars, tutorials or supervision meetings; participating in group work and collaborative activities; engaging with digital learning environments and resources; submitting formative and summative assessments in a timely manner; meeting research or dissertation milestones; making proactive use of academic services; and maintaining regular communication with the University, including keeping contact details up to date.
- 1.3 Promoting and supporting academic engagement ensures that all students are enabled to manage their learning effectively, make informed use of the wide range of opportunities available to them, and progress confidently through each stage of their academic experience. Active and consistent academic engagement with a programme of study's activities helps students to build strong academic foundations, access timely support and guidance, participate in enrichment activities such as the Summer Term Programme, and develop the confidence, skills and independence needed for success, including improved academic performance and future readiness.
- 1.4 Through sustained academic engagement, students are supported to cultivate the graduate attributes valued by the University becoming intellectually curious, future-focused individuals who act with practical wisdom, collaborate with others, and contribute positively to the communities around them.

2. Expectations and Responsibilities

- 2.1 Expectations around academic engagement will vary depending on level and mode of study, the structure of the programme, and, where relevant, the requirements of professional or regulatory bodies. However, all students are expected to demonstrate ongoing, active commitment to their studies and to participate fully in the opportunities that form an essential part of their learning experience and academic success. Greater academic engagement is consistently associated with stronger academic outcomes, deeper learning, and improved confidence, enabling students to make the most of their university experience and progress successfully through their programme.
- 2.2 As students progress, particularly into later stages of undergraduate study or into postgraduate (especially research) programmes, the nature of academic engagement is likely to evolve to reflect increasing levels of autonomy.
- 2.3 The University is committed to supporting students to engage effectively with their studies. This includes providing high-quality teaching, learning resources and environments; access to staff for academic discussion and personal support; and timely academic and wellbeing services.
- 2.4 In turn, Principal Academic Units (PAUs) are expected to clearly communicate with their students what consistent and active academic engagement looks like in the context of their discipline, and what it enables, including stronger academic outcomes, timely support, and confident progression. This guidance should be introduced at induction and re-induction and reinforced at appropriate points throughout the academic year.

- 2.5 All PAUs are expected to communicate clearly to their students the engagement indicators and thresholds applicable to their programmes in accordance with this Code of Practice and the Policy for Student Academic Engagement. These should be introduced at induction and re-induction and reinforced at appropriate points in the academic year.
- 2.6 Engagement indicators include, for example: participation in scheduled learning activities such as lectures, seminars, or supervision meetings; timely submission of required formative and summative assessments; adherence to agreed research or dissertation milestones; and maintaining regular communication with the University (for example, responding to official communications, keeping contact details up to date). For some programmes, particularly those subject to professional or regulatory requirements, these indicators may also include placement attendance or other mandated activities. Clear indicators and thresholds support students in understanding what is expected, encourage active participation, and help staff identify and address any concerns at an early stage. For postgraduate research students, engagement indicators will also reflect the requirements set out in the University's *Code of Practice on Supervision and Monitoring Progress of Postgraduate Researchers*.
- 2.7 A student who is unable to participate in their programme's activities, due to illness or other reasons impacting their ability to study, must ensure that they notify the University via the appropriate routes as early as possible. This may include engaging in a timely manner (i.e. before any deadline) with relevant absence reporting or extenuating circumstances processes, contacting Student Support, Wellbeing Services, or a relevant academic member of staff, such as their Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) or Supervisor. Students are also expected to proactively inform their PAU if they become aware of any emerging circumstances that may affect their ability to meet engagement expectations. The student can then be supported to return to full engagement. Supporting documentary evidence will normally be required from students for any significant period of non-engagement.
- 2.8 For some students, a Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP) for a recognised and registered disability may indicate that regular attendance or engagement could be affected, for example due to recurring medical appointments or periods where a condition temporarily worsens. The RAP does not exempt students from attendance and engagement requirements, but it provides the context for a sensitive and pragmatic approach, ensuring that overall engagement is maintained in a way that supports the student's continued academic success.
- 2.9 Academic engagement concerns should be addressed as soon as possible after they are identified, to allow students a fair and reasonable opportunity to re-engage and to benefit from the full range of academic and wellbeing support available to them. Prompt action ensures that support can be put in place when it is most effective and reduces the risk of issues escalating to the point of impacting progression or attainment. Where necessary, actions to address concerns will be aligned with key dates in the academic calendar to ensure students have sufficient time to respond and, if required, to seek advice. Where welfare concerns are identified, relevant wellbeing teams will be consulted before any escalation, to ensure that support is offered alongside any academic interventions. Expected timescales for each of the Escalation Stages will be set out in the Policy for Student Academic Engagement to ensure that actions are timely and transparent.
- 2.10 As part of the University's commitment to supporting student academic engagement, the PAU will consider whether there may be underlying health, wellbeing, or personal circumstances affecting a student's participation. Where such circumstances are identified or suspected, the PAU will take appropriate steps to ensure these are considered, and that relevant support is offered in line with the *Code of Practice on Health, Wellbeing and Fitness to Study*. This approach ensures that engagement concerns are addressed in a supportive and holistic way, recognising that personal circumstances may have a temporary or ongoing impact on a student's ability to engage.

3. Monitoring of Academic Engagement

- 3.1 To ensure that students are supported appropriately and that any academic engagement concerns are identified as early as possible, the University monitors academic engagement throughout the academic year. All PAUs are expected to monitor academic engagement in line with the principles and indicators set out in this Code of Practice. Academic engagement monitoring is designed to be holistic, proportionate, and sensitive to the varying contexts of different programmes and modes of study, while ensuring consistency across the institution.
- 3.2 Academic engagement monitoring also supports the University's commitment to equity, inclusion, and academic success. It enables timely identification of students who may be at risk of disengagement and offers a mechanism for proactive academic and wellbeing support. It also helps to highlight students, particularly those from groups historically underrepresented in higher education, whose patterns of participation may indicate a risk of not achieving successful academic outcomes. Monitoring is therefore a key enabler of progression and attainment, and an important tool for reducing differential outcomes.
- 3.3 In addition to its educational purposes, academic engagement monitoring also fulfils the University's responsibilities under a range of external requirements. These requirements can arise from regulatory, legal, or contractual obligations linked to particular groups of students. A critical requirement is compliance with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) responsibilities for students studying in the UK sponsored under a Student Route Visa. Institutions are required to monitor academic engagement (including attendance) with clearly defined and consistently applied practices, effective recording, and timely follow-up in order to meet these obligations. It may also include meeting specific monitoring and reporting obligations for certain groups of students, for example those on degree apprenticeship programmes, as set out in the apprenticeship agreement with the employer. This Code of Practice also sets out the University's institutional approach to meeting those requirements.
- 3.4 Whilst undertaking a period of study abroad, those students who are not Student Visa holders will not be subject to this code. Instead, they will be governed by the attendance / engagement requirements of their host institution during this time and are advised to ensure that they familiarise themselves with any such requirements as early as possible. For those students who hold a Student Visa to study in the UK, the University will continue to monitor their on-campus engagement in consultation with the host institution. This is to ensure that the University meets its Home Office Sponsor Licence obligations.

4. Academic Engagement Concerns and Escalation

- 4.1 Where a student's level of academic engagement is lacking or falls below the expected standard for their programme as defined by the published engagement indicators (see 2.6), the Home PAU will contact the student to explore the reasons for reduced or inconsistent engagement and to identify any academic or wellbeing support that may be required. In the case of joint or multidisciplinary programmes, the Home PAU will take responsibility for this contact and consideration, with input as appropriate from the other PAU(s). The intention of this early contact is to resolve concerns at the earliest possible stage and to enable the student to take prompt steps towards re-establishing consistent academic engagement. Students are expected to respond promptly to any request from their PAU regarding engagement, and to check their University email account regularly for such notifications.
- 4.2 Following initial contact, where there is sufficient evidence for a cause for concern arising from reduced, inconsistent, or absent academic engagement, the PAU will follow up with the student to outline the next steps and any further action to address the issue. These actions will be proportionate to the nature and extent of the concern and may include, but are not limited to, referral to appropriate wellbeing or student support services, adjustments to study plans, or

discussion with relevant academic staff such as a PAT, Supervisor, or Programme Director. This stage aims to ensure that students are supported in re-establishing consistent academic engagement and in making effective use of available resources.

- 4.3 Where concerns about a student's academic engagement are identified, PAUs will follow the Escalation Stages set out in the Policy for Student Academic Engagement. This process will be applied in a proportionate, staged manner that is consistent across all programmes and levels of study. The purpose of this process is to ensure that concerns are acted on promptly, that students are given clear opportunities to address any issues, and that decisions are fair and transparent. The Escalation Stages will normally include early, informal contact to discuss the concern; formal intervention and agreed actions where concerns persist; and, where necessary, referral to the appropriate academic decision-making body. Where concerns persist over time, a student's engagement record from previous academic years may also be taken into account to ensure that escalation decisions are fair and fully informed. Taken together, this approach enables timely support, promotes consistency across the University, and ensures that students are treated equitably.
- 4.4 Students have the right to appeal decisions that impact their academic progress in accordance with the University's *Code of Practice on Academic Appeals*. This ensures that any decision is open to independent review and that students are able to present further evidence or clarification if they believe a decision has been made in error or without full consideration of their circumstances. Information on the right of appeal, including relevant deadlines, will be provided as part of the formal notification of any decision affecting a student's continuation or progression. In some cases, unresolved academic engagement concerns may lead to formal decisions about a student's continuation or progression, in accordance with University Regulations.
- 4.5 For programmes that are subject to professional, statutory, or regulatory body requirements, academic engagement will also be considered in the context of those requirements. In such cases, concerns about engagement may have implications for a student's professional suitability and may therefore be referred under the University's *Code of Practice on Misconduct and Fitness to Practise*. This ensures that both academic and professional obligations are met, that students are considered in line with the standards expected by their profession, and that any outcomes or sanctions are determined through the appropriate Fitness to Practise procedures.
- 4.6 PAUs will maintain records of academic engagement concerns, interventions, and outcomes, in accordance with University policy and data protection legislation. Records will normally include the nature of the concern, the support or actions offered, and the agreed outcomes or next steps. Anonymised summaries of cases will be reviewed periodically by the University to ensure the consistent application of this Code of Practice, to monitor trends, and to support institutional oversight of academic engagement practices. These summaries will also inform institutional reporting to relevant University bodies.