

LTC15D058

Title: Review of the implementation of the University's procedures for Attendance Monitoring
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Issue

The University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee required a review of the new procedures that it had approved for handling breaches to General Regulation 13 (Attendance, Engagement and Progress). The new procedures have been implemented from 2014-15.

Recommendation

The recipients are asked to receive the update of what has happened with the University's monitoring of students' attendance, and note that some developments may be carried out in 2015-16.

Resource Implications

Not applicable.

Risk Implications

Not applicable.

Equality and Diversity

Not applicable.

Timing of decisions

The Committee is not being asked to make a decision.

Further Information

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Background

The University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee approved new procedures for handling breaches to General Regulation 13 (Attendance, Engagement and Progress) for implementation from 2014-15. It required a review of the progress made in terms of following the revised procedures as well as checking whether any further changes are needed.

Discussion

To follow the revised procedures, there were some challenges for colleagues e.g. the need to complete electronic registers, set up and record discussions in Initial meetings with students etc. On the whole, however, most Schools have followed most of the key steps of the revised process.

Attachments

The review report is below

Review of the implementation of the University's procedures for Attendance Monitoring

1. Introduction

The University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee approved new procedures for handling breaches to General Regulation 13 (Attendance, Engagement and Progress) for implementation from 2014-15. It required a review of the progress made in terms of following the revised procedures as well as checking whether any further changes are needed.

This report sets out how the revised procedures have been implemented, the mechanism of supplying information/data to Schools in order to support attendance monitoring and the future developments required in terms of ensuring that staff have the relevant information.

2. Summary of changes to the procedures for handling breaches to General Regulation 13 (Attendance, Engagement and Progress)

- (i) All Schools to monitor the UG and PGT student attendance on award bearing courses, including Visiting students;
- (ii) Module Organisers to ensure a minimum of one register per week is completed for all students (where teaching patterns permit). Schools may continue with their current practice if they are taking more registers;
- (iii) A review of attendance records to be completed by a nominated member of academic staff (e.g. Senior Adviser, Year Lead) at least twice per semester. Attendance records will be provided by LTS but Advisers have access to their advisees' attendance records to review when they wish on eVision;
- (iv) Initial meeting: a nominated member of academic staff (e.g. the student's Adviser) to meet with the student(s);
- (v) If a student's attendance, engagement and/or progress continues to fall below a level determined by the School, the Head of School (HoS) or nominated deputy may have a formal meeting with the student, supported by LTS. Options available to the HoS are set out in the flow-chart and include a formal HoS' warning. Under new procedure, the HoS may refer the student to SSDC if attendance/

engagement/progress does not improve after one warning, without the need for multiple warnings;

- (vi) UEA students on placements - the HoS or nominated deputy must ensure that any records relating to absences whilst on placement are reviewed at least twice per semester. A suitable monitoring method must be agreed between the School and placement provider before a student commences placement. The attendance monitoring process should be documented in their Course Handbook;
- (vii) Tier 4 Visa PGT students must apply to the HoS for permission to complete their dissertation outside the UK. This helps ensure robust records exist to meet the University's obligations to the UKBA. LTS will liaise with Schools regarding attendance concerns for Tier 4 students (especially if the student has missed ten consecutive teaching events).

3. Following the procedure

In terms of (ii) above, a check of LTS's reports for register completion by tutors in 2014-15 indicated that Module Organisers in most Schools make an effort to complete their registers at least once per week. Whilst not all of them do so for all their modules every week, very few tutors completely fail to complete any registers. In the SCI Faculty, where Schools have identified register completion to be an issue, support measures have been put in place for 2015-16, for School-based administrative colleagues to input attendance data on behalf of academic colleagues in modules with over 70 students.

To support (iii) above, virtually all LTS teams have provided reports (set up as Excel templates) to Schools, which pull off information from the Data Warehouse. The only areas where LTS has not provided standard reports concerned PGT and some FMH provision, where the appropriate information is provided in a different format. Reports from the Data Warehouse pull off information from SIS, which hold all the absence records made when students are marked as absent on an electronic register completed by academic colleagues, or when they have reported that they will be absent on eVision. Reports are also available from eVision, for students to view records of their own absences as well as reports for academic colleagues to use in their capacity as advisors to students.

In relation to (iv), whilst most Schools support the concept of providing pastoral care to students who have missed tuition at the earliest opportunity, the mechanism of how the initial meetings are set up differed and it was not always clear to LTS if meetings have taken place. Some Schools (BIO, ENV) queried that it was an admin task to organise a meeting with the student; they did not feel that academic colleagues should be writing to meet with students nor should they have to return a record of the discussion (for which a LTS

template is available) to the LTS Hub. As a result of this, support measures have now been put in place for School-based colleagues in the SCI Faculty to organise initial meetings for academic staff. In other Schools (e.g. ECO, HSC), an appointed Attendance/Engagement Officer has the task of reviewing attendance data and taking appropriate action.

In relation to attendance records whilst the student is on placement, unless there are PSRB requirements, LTS does not necessarily hold information/agreements between Schools and placement providers so it is not known the extent to which Schools have implemented (vi) above. Where there are PSRB requirements (particularly in FMH Schools), however, LTS teams work closely with Schools and placement providers and plays a key role in terms of maintaining, policing and taking proactive action to remind Schools to chase up students with poor attendance.

In summary, most Schools have either followed the revised procedures or where they have identified issues that have prevented them from doing so (particularly the need to record prompt and reliable attendance data, and setting up meetings with students), they have sought solutions and put these in place in 2015-16. Most colleagues were willing to engage with attendance monitoring of students' attendance, even though some colleagues have complained that it took up valuable time for them to complete electronic registers. The latter was, however, crucial in order to ensure that there was sufficient input of data.

4. Are changes needed to the revised procedures?

The issues identified by colleagues were:

- 4.1 Completion of electronic registers – the amount of time it takes for large cohorts, particularly if they are also divided into separate seminar groups. However, input of attendance data is important regardless of the size of the group/module that the student has enrolled on – a possible solution is swipe card (automatic) attendance monitoring, see section 5 below.
- 4.2 Setting up initial meetings – is it an administrative task? Colleagues debate on whom should carry out this task but agree that it is an important part of the process in terms of providing support to students. Schools have carried it out in different ways, which suggests that standardisation may not be helpful.
- 4.3 Record of initial meetings – Schools do not always return templates/records of discussions, which makes it difficult for LTS to track progress. LTS has hitherto always checked with the School and assumed that no initial meeting had taken place, if there was no evidence of discussions, to ensure that students were not taken down to a disciplinary route unnecessarily.
- 4.4 Number of initial meetings – some Schools have a lot of meetings with students, which take up a lot of time for colleagues. Schools

could decide on what an acceptable or unacceptable amount of absence looks like, and it is hoped that students would change their behaviour if they become aware that they are missed if they are absent.

4.5 Reports on attendance monitoring data – the reports on eVision have limitations in terms of what could be displayed. The Excel reports from the Data Warehouse were more accurate but it required LTS staff to provide these to Schools on demand. A further development (see below) may help to solve this issue.

At this stage, there are no proposals to change the procedures for attendance monitoring. However, a tighter follow-up of the process and more robust ways of collecting attendance data and displaying it are deemed to be helpful.

5. Future developments

5.1 Reports to support attendance monitoring

As the University has now purchased a new reporting tool (Tableau), colleagues in the Business Intelligence Unit (BIU) have been asked to reconstruct the equivalent of the current attendance monitoring reports in Tableau. It is hoped that Tableau will eventually replace the Excel reports and eVision reports for staff, but the provision of reports to students may continue in eVision. If the draft Tableau reports are made available for LTS staff for testing in the Spring Semester of 2015-16, it may become possible for the new reports to be used from 2016-17.

5.2 Swipe card (automatic) attendance monitoring

Colleagues from the Student Administration System (SAS) team have met with LTS, to set up a pilot for testing swipe card (automatic) attendance monitoring in large venues (usually lecture theatres) which hold over 50 students. Students would have to bring their campus cards to the lecture and swipe it across a card reader located outside the room. For Schools with PSRB requirements that stipulate evidence of student attendance in theory and practice sessions, e.g. for nursing and midwifery courses, every hour of the student's engagement with the course must be accounted for. This development should therefore free up a considerable amount of time that would be taken up by students signing a paper register.

The pilot will be conducted for HSC in the Spring of 2016 in the first instance. A review of the data available, reports, practicality of application etc will be carried out before it is rolled out to other Schools. More than one pilot and further testing may be required, as it has already been identified that this process cannot accurately reflect the status of attendance for students who have consecutive classes in the same teaching room, e.g. a student who has been timetabled to have 3 x one hour lectures in the same room would have to go outside and swipe their card at the start of the second and third hour in

order to have their attendance at each session recorded. It will cause problems if students forget to do this.

6. Summary

In terms of providing robust information for the University to confirm when a student had been present or absent from timetabled teaching sessions, the policy does not require a register to be taken at every teaching event so the data is currently not available. In terms of demonstrating whether a student is engaging with studies at least once a week, however, the current mechanism of having a minimum requirement to complete at least one register per week is, if policed appropriately by Heads of Schools, a way of ensuring that we have sufficient data. On the whole, most Schools follow the procedures and have some data and reports to demonstrate student attendance, and colleagues in ARM have not raised concerns in terms of the University's collection of data to comply with UKVI rules for monitoring international students with Tier 4 Visas.

Improvements in collecting and displaying attendance data will hopefully make it easier for staff to follow-up and meet with students who have missed tuition, but there are limitations in terms of the amount of development time available for enhancing attendance monitoring, which have a lower priority than other projects (e.g. the roll-out of Tableau reports for supporting Exam Board processes.) It is hoped that the development projects described in section 5 will be carried out in 2015-16 so that the process could be made more efficient.

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