

# Student attendance & engagement

## Guidance from colleagues for colleagues

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## Why are students not attending and/or not engaging?

The University has several mechanisms in place to monitor student attendance and engagement. The reasons for student non-attendance and lack of engagement are varied<sup>1,2,3</sup>. Appreciating *why* students choose not to attend or engage in taught sessions can inform our practice. We outline below some of the challenges and potential solutions with links to relevant resources. This is not an exhaustive list. If there is a lack of attendance or engagement, colleagues are encouraged to ask students (and themselves) why this is and work in partnership with them to co-create solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> OfS Insight Brief (2023) Studying during rises in the cost of living.

<sup>2</sup> Moores, E., Birdi, G.K. and Higson, H.E. (2019). Determinants of university students' attendance. *Educational Research*. **61**(4), pp.371-387.

<sup>3</sup> Oldfield, J., Rodwell, J., Curry, L. and Marks, G. (2018). Psychological and demographic predictors of undergraduate non-attendance at university lectures and seminars. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. **42**(4), pp.509-523.

# Challenges and potential solutions

## Expectations for engagement are unclear

Issue	Potential solutions
<p>Students arrive at university with a spectrum of preparedness for learning and engagement at university</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish 'ground rules' in partnership with students to encourage professional behaviours in taught sessions/group work.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>UoR Student Charter</u></li> <li>○ <u>Making the most of group work: a guide for staff</u></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Signpost, normalise and set expectations for engagement with specialist support teams e.g. <u>Careers Events</u>, <u>Library and Study Advice webinars and workshops</u>, <u>Life Tools Programme</u>.</li> <li>• Encourage good study habits by providing:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ structured individual or collaborative <u>learning activities</u> before and after taught sessions which connect learning.</li> <li>○ opportunities for students to 'learn about learning' e.g. differences between deep and surface learning, <u>how to use feedback effectively</u>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Embed academic and personal effectiveness skills with disciplinary-focused context into the core curriculum.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Staff guide: embedding academic skills</u></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Be clear about the level of work and commitment required outside of taught sessions and revisit this throughout the semester e.g. use of <u>Module Roadmaps and Weekly Plans</u>.</li> <li>• Use a consistent Blackboard design and structure to reduce the cognitive strain on students.</li> <li>• Adopt a consistent School, Department or Programme team attendance and monitoring policy that can be clearly communicated and operationalised.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set expectations around the use of classroom recordings as a study resource, rather than a substitute for attendance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Does the availability of classroom recordings impact student attendance?</u></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Help students appreciate what is expected of them in assessment e.g. use of clear assignment briefs and rubrics, early formative activities/assessments, exemplars, self and peer assessment.</li> <li>• Foster cross-year support between students e.g. Peer Assisted Learning (<u>PAL</u>), <u>STaR mentors</u>.</li> </ul>
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The potential solutions outlined above would benefit from being frontloaded. Being explicit need not imply ‘spoon-feeding.’ Learning should be ‘scaffolded’ according to students’ stage of development with the aim of fostering autonomous learning. As an example of this in practice, online reading lists can be structured in such a way to encourage progression and manage the transition from Part One to Part Three: extracts based on UoR reading lists.

**Further Resources**

- Student Academic Transitions Toolkit (UoR)
- New to University? (UoR)
- How Might We: Embed Academic Literacies into the Curriculum (University of Leeds)
- Longcroft, A. (2017). How much work should I do at home? Using directed independent study to promote effective learning. #15toptips for Student-Centred Teaching, SEDA Blog.
- Sambell, K., Brown, P. & Race, P. Help students appreciate what is expected of them in assessment. (Heriot Watt University)

**Parallel modules compete for students’ time and attention**

Issue	Potential solutions
Students’ time and attention is divided between multiple modules running concurrently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move to fewer larger modules (as part of PRP).</li> <li>• Take a programme level view of scheduled and self-scheduled learning activities to distribute student workload more evenly.</li> </ul>

<p>Prolific use of low stakes summative assessment to capture students' time and attention (i.e. using assessments as 'pedagogies of control' resulting in an 'assessment arms race'<sup>4,5</sup>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use fewer summative assessments (as part of PRP).</li> <li>• Instead use formative activities that prepare students well for summative assessment (and don't add to your workload!).</li> </ul>
<p>Bunching of assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a programme level view of assessment submission points/ create a coursework calendar (as part of PRP) and work together to distribute submission points more evenly across teaching and assessment weeks, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can submission points for any year-long modules not occur at the end of semester 1 (where semester long submission points may be in place)?</li> <li>○ Where students choose between optional modules in a basket, can submission points be on the same day to make co-ordination easier?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consider <u>methods of assessment</u> that more evenly distribute student effort e.g. patchwork texts, learning <u>journals/e-portfolios</u>, and other 'staged' assessments where students produce short pieces, get feedback and these contribute to the overall end product e.g. essay plan and annotated bibliography (30%).</li> </ul>

### Further Resources

- Sambell, K., Brown, P. & Race, P. Giving Formative Feedback Prior To Submitting Summative Tasks (Heriot Watt University).
- Jones-Devitt, S., Lawton, M. & Mayne, W. (2016). Patchwork Assessment Practice Guide. HEA.

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<sup>4</sup> Harland, T., McLean, A., Wass, R., Miller, E. & Nui Sim, K. (2015). An Assessment arms race and its fallout: High-stakes grading and the case for slow scholarship. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. **40**(4), 528-541.

<sup>5</sup> O'Neill, G.M. (2019). Why Don't We Want to Reduce Assessment? *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*. **11**(2).

## Students appear apathetic

Issue	Potential solutions
Students lack motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish explicit links to learning outcomes and assessment in taught sessions and for learning activities outside of class.</li> <li>• Foster students' intrinsic motivation by creating a learning environment that promotes autonomy, mastery and purpose<sup>6</sup>. For example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Autonomy: give students choice about what and how they learn and are assessed where appropriate.</li> <li>○ Mastery: ensure students are appropriately challenged (i.e. 'stretch' not 'stress').</li> <li>○ Purpose: ensure learning and assessment are meaningful and relevant e.g. by making links to other modules, using news and current events to provide a 'hook' for learning; increase use of 'authentic' assessment (as part of PRP).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Students do not see the value of taught sessions and when they do attend they are not engaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move away from didactic forms of teaching (which encourage passive learning) towards more interactive, student-centred and inclusive approaches (i.e. active learning).               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>PRP guidance on teaching approaches</u></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Create a safe and inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing their opinions without being judged e.g. use of anonymous polls, establishing and upholding ground rules for engagement, providing positive feedback and building on student contributions.</li> <li>• Emphasise the benefits of collaboration and create opportunities for peer conversations and collaborative learning.</li> </ul>

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<sup>6</sup> Pink, D.H. (2011). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. Penguin.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all colleagues designing and delivering the programme engage in appropriate professional development e.g. engaging with <u>CQSD's Teaching &amp; Learning Programme</u>, <u>Reflecting on practice with colleagues</u>.</li> </ul>
Students fall behind and feel it is too late to get back on track	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure programmes are coherent and that the learning pathway through the programme is articulated and shared with students.</li> <li>• Normalise conversations around set-backs.</li> <li>• Identify struggling students early; reach out and encourage them to discuss their challenges and remind them of the support available.</li> <li>• Promote a supportive learning environment where students can collaborate and support each other e.g. group study and peer mentoring.</li> </ul>

### Further resources

- Healey, M. & Healey, R. Embedding Active Learning into Your Teaching Practice (Heriot Watt University).
- Turner, I., Norton, S., & Moody, J. (2020). #52etc – a toolkit for student engagement. Advance HE.

### Barriers to belonging<sup>7</sup>

Issue	Potential solutions
Students are unsure why they are at university/ or the role of H.E. studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore with students how attendance and engagement play a role in the value of H.E. experience (beyond just getting the grades to progress).</li> <li>• Inspire in students a curiosity about their options, and a deeper understanding of their own strengths, values, motivations and attitudes e.g. embed employability skills, careers curiosity and work-related learning across the programme; provide opportunities for students to reflect and articulate what they have learned.</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> Based on Black, S., Capper, G. and Jackson, A. (2022) Building Belonging in Higher Education Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach. Pearson & Wonkhe.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster a passion for lifelong learning as a means of personal and professional development, emphasising the value of H.E. studies as a structured approach to learning.</li> </ul>
Students do not feel connected to their cohort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote early integration of students within and across cohorts by using pedagogies that promote collaborative working and peer networking (e.g. <u>making the most of group work</u>, <u>enquiry-based learning</u>, <u>peer assisted learning</u>, field trips).</li> <li>• <u>Promote cohort cohesion online</u></li> <li>• <u>Use Blackboard for start of semester communications</u> to help students orientate themselves with modules and the expectations for engagement.</li> </ul>
Students cannot see themselves in the course content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use diverse guest speakers on modules which lack diverse teaching staff, whilst being mindful not to overburden individual colleagues.</li> <li>• Diversify the curriculum by recognising the contributions made by different genders, cultures, races and the perspectives of/impact on different groups, enabling students to see themselves in their discipline. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Inclusive Teaching and Learning at Reading</u></li> <li>○ <u>Decolonising the Curriculum resources</u></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Students lack agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in partnership with students to regularly evaluate the curriculum.</li> <li>• Increase opportunities for students to co-create/shape the curriculum. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Student voice &amp; Partnership</u></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Offer constructive feedback so students feel empowered and confident to develop their work. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Focus on Feedback</u></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Students cannot access content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure learning materials are accessible so all students can easily engage with them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Digital Accessibility in T&amp;L</u></li> <li>○ <u>Creating accessible resources</u></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Students' mental health and wellbeing e.g. social anxiety,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the curriculum is supporting good wellbeing and learning.</li> </ul>

<p>tiredness due to studying alongside shift work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide consistency in terms of academic support for students.</li> <li>• Integrate the Academic Tutor system with the core curriculum (e.g. a Part 1 module having tutorials with the academic tutor in a small group to allow tutors to get to know their tutees).</li> <li>• Ensure all colleagues can confidently signpost students to the support available. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Academic Tutor <a href="#">Referral Flowchart</a></li> <li>○ <a href="#">Cost of living Taskforce</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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**Further resources**

- Hughes, G, Upsher, R, Nobili, A, Kirkman, A, Wilson, C, BowersBrown, T, Foster, J, Bradley, S and Byrom, N (2022) [Education for Mental Health](#). Advance HE.
- [Embedding and Assessing Compassion in the University Curriculum](#) (website created by Theo Gilbert, University of Hertfordshire).

**Cost-of-living crisis**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Potential solutions</b>
<p>Students having to be selective re which classes to attend due to clashes with paid employment, costs of commuting/ childcare etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make full use of Blackboard/TEL to support delivery and promote flexibility e.g. ensure module content and online activities are uploaded promptly to help students choose when and how they want to engage with the material to prepare for taught sessions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Engaging students with your digital practice</a>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Implement a more regular timetable that can be shared with students in advance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The move to a compulsory Part 1, Semester 1 and optional module baskets (as part of PRP) should ease pressure on the timetable and help alleviate this.</li> <li>○ Discuss any timetabling challenges with the Timetabling Team.</li> <li>○ Signpost commuting students to <a href="#">Commuter Travel Bursary</a> for some financial support.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## Version control

VERSION	DATE MODIFIED	MODIFIED BY
1.0	30/03/2023	Nina Brooke on behalf of the UG PD CoP
2.0	31/05/2023	Nina Brooke following feedback from UG PDs who attended meeting on 13 <sup>th</sup> March
3.0	06/09/2023	Tatiana Rowson and Nina Brooke following T&L workshop session delivered on 13 <sup>th</sup> July