

POLICY ON STUDENT ATTENDANCE



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy has been developed as part of the University's commitment to provide a supportive learning environment in which encouragement is given to all students to develop a range of skills, abilities and approaches to their studies and other activities.
- 1.2 The policy outlines a basic framework for Schools and Postgraduate Institutes (collectively referred to as Schools throughout this document), which Schools should refer to when developing student attendance monitoring systems.
- 1.3 This policy is applicable to students studying at all Heriot Watt University campuses and on all programmes of study where attendance is expected as part of the minimum requirements.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 In developing this policy, the University aims to:
 - 2.1.1 Support and encourage students to achieve their full potential in their studies and in developing lifelong skills and competencies;
 - 2.1.2 Enhance the overall learning environment by encouraging active participation through regular attendance in all areas of study;
 - 2.1.3 Provide guidance on why attendance is important;
 - 2.1.4 Use attendance as one of the factors to be taken into account in reviewing a student's commitment to, and performance in, their academic studies and in developing an appropriate response to specific concerns about performance.

3. KEY PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 Students are active participants in their learning experiences and must take responsibility for achieving their potential through successful completion of each stage of their studies.
- 3.2 Monitoring attendance can provide an indication of student commitment, motivation and any difficulties which need to be addressed; it is an essential element of helping students to learn.¹

¹ Educational Development Unit, *Retention Report* (J. Dickinson & V. Bamber, 2005), May 2005 (<http://www.hw.ac.uk/internal/ltb/LTAWG.htm>)
The Learning & Teaching Board's *Retention Working Group, Final Report*, (M. King), September 2003
"Why do students leave University early?" Research Briefing 1, Centre for Research into Socially Inclusive Services (CRSIS), (H. Christie & M. Munro, School of the Built Environment), 2003
"Learning and Study Skills: Fulfilling the needs of new undergraduates from under-represented groups and the whole Heriot-Watt Experience". Wider Access Research Projects I and II, prepared for Heriot-Watt University (J. Rougvie & E. Sutton, Wider Access Unit), 2002;

- 3.3 Regular attendance and academic achievement are closely linked. Students who regularly attend classes are more likely to enjoy a rewarding experience in which core skills and abilities, such as team-working, are developed.
- 3.4 Attendance is a key component in student retention, progression, achievement and employability (for example, in terms of developing workplace skills). For instance, students who experience problems with attendance may have a variety of reasons for not approaching the University for guidance in advance of withdrawal (either formal or de facto). It is therefore important that schools have in place effective mechanisms to monitor the attendance of students they consider to be “at risk”, and to engage with them positively at an early stage.
- 3.5 Following from the above, it is important that an integrated approach is adopted between Schools and key Support Services in order to provide all students (and most especially those considered to be “at risk”) with the appropriate structure for support when dealing with poor attendance.
- 3.6 Students in the early stages of their University education are more prone to poor attendance than those at later stages. By focussing on first and second year undergraduate students, the majority of cases of poor student attendance at Heriot-Watt University will be addressed. At the same time, schools will be taking positive steps to address retention and progression issues.
- 3.7 In accordance with its commitment to helping students to fulfil their individual potential, the University expects all students to attend all scheduled learning sessions, for example, timetabled lectures, seminars, tutorials, workshops and laboratory sessions. A number of University Regulations² and University Procedures on Compulsory Withdrawals³ apply to this attendance policy and these should be brought to the attention of students.
- 3.8 The only exception to the above should be in circumstances where ill health or other legitimate reasons prevent students attending these sessions. Students are responsible for informing their School of these circumstances.
- 3.9 Schools should monitor attendance but may apply their own attendance requirements, provided that such requirements are consistent with the principles set out in this guidance. Students should be made aware of these requirements in writing and should also be advised of the support available to them should they fall short of them.

Retention and widening participation, Learning and Teaching Board (J. Rougvie), June 2003.

² Regulation 3: Modular First Degrees;
Regulation 3, Schedule 1A: Degree of Bachelor in Combined Studies;
Regulation 4: Postgraduate Diplomas and Graduate Diplomas;
Regulation 18: Postgraduate Certificates and Graduate Certificates;
Regulation 38: Certificates and Diplomas of Higher Education;
Regulation 48: Higher Degree of Master (Taught).

Please also refer to Amendments to Regulations contained in Appendix Two below

³ Please refer to “Procedures for Compulsory Withdrawal” document (approved by the Senate, May 2007)

- 3.10 The existence of this Heriot-Watt University policy and all specific attendance requirements, designed to improve retention and manage student expectations, should be made clear to prospective and current students through the following means:
- 3.10.1 Undergraduate and Postgraduate Prospectuses, Open Days, School Visit Days, Recruitment Fairs and Widening Access Events;
 - 3.10.2 Registration Packs and all Registration/Induction events held across the University;
 - 3.10.3 Course Handbooks (current examples of this good practice may be found within the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences and the School of the Built Environment, a summary of which appears in Appendix I);
 - 3.10.4 The Student Senate and other Students Association channels, for example School Officers and representatives on School Student/Staff Committees);
 - 3.10.5 Information provided by key Support Services (for example, Student Welfare Services).