

**STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH LEARNING: SCHEDULED LEARNING
AND TEACHING ACTIVITY (CONTACT HOURS) POLICY****Student Engagement with Learning****Scheduled Learning and Teaching Activity ('Contact Hours') Policy****1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Sheffield Hallam University places the highest priority on providing an excellent educational experience for all its students. Student engagement with learning is an essential ingredient of an excellent educational experience¹
- 1.2. This paper focuses on student engagement with their learning and in particular on the role of scheduled learning and teaching activities. The paper revises the proposals considered by Academic Quality Standards and Enhancement Committee in June 2015 for a policy on contact hours (AQSEC/4/15/9).
- 1.3. This revised policy places contact hours into the wider context of student engagement and sets out revised versions to the policy statements in response to feedback from AQSEC (June 2015), Academic Board (February 2016) and feedback from faculties.
- 1.4. This policy applies only to undergraduate programmes. Scheduled learning and teaching activity for postgraduate programmes requires further detailed consideration and will be incorporated into work on expectations of postgraduate study.

2. Internal and External Reference Points

- 2.1. External reference points:
 - i. BIS grant letter to HEFCE (2016)²
 - ii. Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2012) Quality Code Chapters B3 (Learning and Teaching)³
 - iii. Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2011) Contact Hours: A Guide for Students⁴
 - iv. Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2011) Explaining Contact Hours: Guidance for Institutions providing Public Information about HE in the UK ⁵
 - v. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), definitions for Key Information Set (KIS) purposes.
 - vi. National Union of Students (NUS) (2015) Comprehensive Guide to Learning and Teaching⁶
 - vii. Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) / Higher Education Academy (HEA) (2015) Student academic experience survey⁷

¹ Learning and Teaching Strategy (2020)

² Funding for higher education in England for 2016-17: HEFCE grant letter from BIS, <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2016/Name,107598,en.html> last accessed 6 March 2016

³ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/uk-quality-code-for-higher-education-chapter-b3-learning-and-teaching>, last accessed February 2016

⁴ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/contact-hours-student.pdf> last accessed February 2016

⁵ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/contact-hours.pdf> last accessed February 2016

⁶ <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/comprehensive-guide-to-learning-and-teaching> last accessed February 2016

⁷ http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/AS-PRINTED-HEA_HEPI_report_print4.pdf, last accessed February 2016

- 2.2. Student engagement with learning is a key theme of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy (2020) which states that: *'Our courses will systematically develop our students' skills and capabilities through their transition into and engagement with their course, transforming them as self-reliant, resilient, critical thinkers, able to work effectively in complex and ever-changing situations.'*
- 2.3. The University's Student Attendance Statement approved in 2014 (AB/2/14/7) states that: *'The University is committed to supporting student achievement and facilitating full student engagement with their studies. The University's approach to learning places high value on the active engagement of all students with their peers, teaching staff and other external/professional experts.'*

3. Context

- 3.1. Student engagement with learning has been defined as *'participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes'*⁸. A robust body of evidence demonstrates a clear correlation between student engagement with learning and positive student outcomes⁹. This evidence consistently identifies the same teaching, learning and assessment practices that predict learning gains, such as close contact with teachers, prompt feedback, clear and high expectations, collaborative learning and 'time on task'¹⁰¹¹
- 3.2. Interaction between other students and staff is a key aspect of these practices, and the quality of these interactions is a significant predictor of a student's academic success. These interactions have many forms depending on the design of the programme and its underpinning pedagogy. They include formal (scheduled) learning and teaching activities which take place in a variety of physical and online learning environments. These formal activities also include interactions such as one-to-one support and guidance from academic and other support staff. Scheduled teaching and learning activities, frequently referred to as 'contact hours', vary significantly between subject disciplines. This reflects that teaching and learning, and related direct contact with staff, should be appropriate to the discipline, the learning environment and the pedagogy of that discipline.
- 3.3. The key purpose of 'contact time' with staff is to engage students in their learning and to encourage students to become active learners as part of the wider learner community. That is, the process is an interactive one which carries responsibilities for the University and teaching staff in providing the highest quality teaching in appropriate and well-resourced environments and for students in actively engaging with the learning process.

⁸ Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J.A., Bridges, B.K. and Hayek, J.C. (2007) Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions, and Recommendations. ASHE Higher Education Report, Vol 32, No 5. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

⁹ Trowler, V., 2010. Student engagement literature review. The Higher Education Academy, 11, pp.1-15.

¹⁰ Gibbs, G., 2010. Dimensions of quality. York: Higher Education Academy.

¹¹ Evans, C (2016) High impact pedagogies and student engagement in learning https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/high_impact_pedagogies.pdf last accessed March 2016

- 3.4. As indicated by the student engagement literature summarised by Trowler (2010) there are a number of factors, such as class size, that influence the quality of student engagement with learning. There is little evidence to suggest that increasing contact hours alone improves the quality of student learning. What seems to matter is the nature of the contact and in particular contact that involves at least some interaction between teachers and students.
- 3.5. A low level of contact is however equally problematic and can lead to a lack of a conceptual framework within which subsequent study can be framed leading to reduced engagement with the subject. In order to engender student success it is therefore essential that there is a focus on the quality of contact combined with a threshold level of contact within a clearly defined pedagogic framework that promotes engagement.
- 3.6. 'Contact hours' have been a talisman for some time for politicians keen to castigate universities for not providing "value for money". This has resulted in the Key Information Set and the grant letter to HEFCE from BIS published on 4th March 2016, makes reference to the inclusion of teaching intensity/contact hours in future metrics for the Teaching Excellence Framework and the information published to students.
- 3.7. This policy addresses the need to balance these competing pressures It does so by moving the focus to a policy on scheduled learning and teaching activities and the requirement for departmental, subject based, statements. These subject based statements will include reference to the threshold level of contact. The threshold level will be determined with reference to subject benchmark information on scheduled learning and teaching activity and to resource implications.

4. Benchmarking

- 4.1. In developing this policy, considerable work was undertaken during 2014/15 to gather, analyse and benchmark data across all faculties drawn from a range of sources including the timetabling system. This resulted in a number of supplementary papers providing further context and data are available on the AQSEC Sharepoint site including¹²:
 - reviews of the information from the KIS providing context and background.
 - a review of the wider sector and national context
 - an updated summary of key definitions and typology, primarily for KIS-reporting purposes
 - a composite of various university-wide benchmarking data.

5. University Statement

- 5.1. Sheffield Hallam University places the highest priority on providing an excellent educational experience for all its students. This experience is based on high quality learning and teaching activities designed and delivered to engage students with their

¹² [TOG 2-14-6.1 Contact hours and student feedback - february 2014](#)

[TOG 5 14 8.1- contact hours - KIS data \(i\)](#)

[TOG 5 14 8.2 Copy of contact hours data sets - composite](#)

learning, facilitate student success and to equip our students with the knowledge, expertise and capabilities needed to excel in their chosen professions.

6. Definition

- 6.1. Departmental statements will be based on the definition provided for HESA / KIS purposes, augmented by relevant subject and course level activities that support student learning.
- For HESA/KIS purposes scheduled learning and teaching activity refers to the time specific (and usually timetabled) periods for learning and teaching activities, at module level, involving the direct and active participation of a teacher/instructor. This can take a variety of forms including online.
 - The HESA/KIS definition also includes course level activities delivered to students but which are not linked to modules (for example, induction and the academic advisor system, industry days etc.) and also fieldwork and external visits.
 - The information provided for KIS also includes placements and guided independent study.
- 6.2. In addition to the HESA/KIS definitions subject based statements can include other forms of scheduled activity that support student learning such as peer learning and academic societies.

7. Policy Statements

- 7.1. The following policy statements set out requirements that must be met by all undergraduate programmes of study.
- 7.2. The full study hours for a module is based on 10 hours per credit (i.e. 200 hours per 20 credits). This consists of a combination of scheduled, tutor-led activities, tutor-directed study and self-directed or independent study.
- 7.3. The full number of teaching weeks will be used for scheduled learning and teaching activity. For undergraduate programmes the teaching period for single semester modules is 12 weeks and 24 weeks for year-long modules.
- 7.4. The full number of weeks will be used for scheduled learning and teaching activities unless an alternative pattern of delivery (e.g. block delivery; front-loading of teaching) is approved.
- 7.5. Reading weeks are permitted where approved by Departmental Management Boards. These weeks provide structured tutor directed activities and do not include formal scheduled teaching and learning activities.
- 7.6. Study weeks as specified in the academic calendar will be used for course-based learning and teaching activities as determined by the course team. These will normally be tutor directed activities and would not include scheduled teaching and learning activities.

- 7.7. Academic departments are required to have a departmental statement on scheduled learning and teaching activities in place for the start of academic year 2016/17. These statements will typically consist of a number of subject discipline statements and will be reviewed annually.
- 7.8. These subject based statements will include reference to the threshold level of scheduled learning and teaching activity determined in reference to subject benchmark information.
- 7.9. The threshold level of scheduled learning and teaching activity will take into account subject benchmarks and be set in order to ensure that these are, on average, above the bottom quartile.
- 7.10. The University will make available to all applicants and students clear information about the teaching and learning on their course.
- 7.11. The policy statements apply to all University provision, including that delivered in collaboration with partners. However, it is recognised that the University operates a wide and diverse collaborative register and that there may be some variation in the delivery of the same or similar provision at partner institutions. The explanation and rationale for any such variations will be made explicit in departmental statements.

8. Departmental Statements

- 8.1. These statements will typically consist of a number of subject discipline statements reflecting a department's academic portfolio.
- 8.2. Statements will be written in a form that is accessible by students and will be included in relevant information provided to students.
- 8.3. Statements will be accompanied by a supporting rationale which justifies the threshold level and nature of scheduled learning and teaching activity with reference to subject pedagogy, subject benchmark data and resource constraints.
- 8.4. Detailed guidance and subject benchmarking data will be provided to support the development of these statements. This will also include guidance on Competition and Market Authority requirements.
- 8.5. The development and review of these statements will be co-ordinated by faculties, supported by the directorates of Learning Enhancement and Academic Development (LEAD) and Student Engagement, Evaluation and Research (STEER).

9. Approval, Review and Monitoring of Departmental Statements

- 9.1. Departmental statements will be approved and reviewed annually through Departmental Management Boards. Departmental Management Boards will be required to ensure compliance with University policy and consistency between cognate disciplines e.g. in teaching and learning practices, allowances for project / dissertation supervision, and the balance between small and large group teaching. In

approving departmental statements, Departmental Management Boards will also take into consideration subject benchmark data and resource constraints.

- 9.2. Departmental statements will be confirmed by Departmental Management Boards. They will be reported to Faculty Academic Boards to ensure consistency and signed off by Faculty Pro Vice Chancellors to confirm resources. A summary report of all departmental statements will be provided to the University's Academic Board for information. The delivery model for new courses will be considered as part of the business planning and approval process in relation to costings, and by the process for the approval of provision in relation to the appropriateness of the teaching and learning pedagogy. The latter will include input from external subject specialists and from the student body.

10. Co-dependencies

- 10.1. There are a number of co-dependencies relating to the implementation of this policy including:
- i. Course and module information
 - ii. Course and module handbooks
 - iii. Competition and Market Authority requirements
 - iv. Timetabling
 - v. Academic and professional advice
 - vi. Resources available to support the student experience
 - vii. Academic work planning

11. Recommendations

- 11.1. Scheduled learning and teaching activities form only part of the educational offer to students and it is recommended that the University considers the following alongside the introduction of the above policy and the development of departmental statements.
- i. This policy will need to be reviewed on a regular basis to take into account the development of the Teaching Excellence Framework metrics, the current review of Key Information Sets and changes regarding information published to students (CMA).
 - ii. The development of guidance on co- and extra-curricular activities which support engagement with learning and the extension of University and Departmental statements to include these.
 - iii. The development of the timetabling system to incorporate wider aspects of student learning such as meetings with academic advisors, peer assisted learning activities and the availability of resources, such as studio space, to support student learning.

Approved at Academic Board April 2016