Supporting PGT engagement during the masters project - guidance for staff

Source: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/qualitymanual/academic-regulations/min-expec-tl-activity.aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/qualitymanual/academic-regulations/min-expec-tl-activity.aspx)

# 1.1 What are the key principles for UKVI compliance during the masters project/dissertation period?

PGT students who are studying on a student visa must attend a dissertation supervision meeting to discuss their progress at least once a month when there is no simultaneous teaching activity (normally June - August inclusive). In the case of 2 year masters courses, where the research project is longer, the same monthly requirement applies for the duration of the dissertation. PGT supervision meetings need to be scheduled at least every 4-5 weeks and gaps between meetings must not exceed 60 days.

PGT students are also expected to engage with the non-credit bearing Moodle module, PGT Student visa holder – NOOC. NOOC stands for ‘Nottingham Open Online Courses’. The PGT Student visa holder NOOC has been developed in partnership with University of Nottingham Libraries and contains academic and study skills activities relevant to Masters students working on their project/dissertation. Students who are progressing to the project/dissertation should still engage with the NOOC.

Student absence during the PGT masters project/dissertation period must be carefully managed (see 1.9)

# 1.2 Why is there a particular focus on PGT students during the masters project/dissertation period?

When the University acts as the immigration sponsor for student visa holders, this comes with key compliance responsibilities under UK immigration law.

Student visa holders themselves also have [key compliance responsibilities](https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studywithus/international-applicants/visa-help/student-route/responsibilities.aspx) which they agree to at the point of initial registration. We need to support students to protect their immigration status in the UK and avoid a situation where we are supporting them to inadvertently breach their visa conditions.

UKVI require universities to effectively monitor academic engagement for student visa holders for the whole duration of their course. We must also show that we keep records of engagement and that we are taking appropriate intervention steps when student engagement gives cause for concern, never having a 60 gap in engagement or evidence of engagement. This is why we are asking for Schools support with:

* providing monthly meetings to student visa holders in June, July and August (or for the duration of the masters project on 2yr Masters courses)
* recording meetings appropriately (QR codes for in-person meetings and local records where meetings take place online)
* reminding students to engage with activity in the virtual learning environment (Moodle Module/NOOC) during June, July and August
* referring student visa holders to the correct process and to the Visa and Immigration team if they request absences of longer than 2 weeks duration (either from the UK or from supervisions) during their dissertation period

# 1.3 How can the monthly meeting requirement be met?

What supervision means is flexible – it could be a one-to- one meeting or a group meeting and it could be a group skills workshop which is relevant to dissertation writing. Recording attendance is key. Any such session which takes place in-person should be provide students with a QR code scanning opportunity for attendance to be recorded.

# 1.4a Can a supervision meeting take place online?

Where the student is in the UK on a student visa, unless the student has been given formal permission to study at a different location e.g. via a specific personal request (see 1.9 about managing absence) or an academic course requirement, and this has been reported to the UKVI as required, PGT supervision meetings must be face-to-face and on campus.

A local record of any meetings which take place online (including, as a minimum the student name, ID, date and time) must be retained and readily available in case this information is required as evidence at a Home Office audit.

# 1.4b What is the Moodle Module ‘PGT Student visa holder – NOOC?

Acknowledging local implications of the above and the shortness of time, we are also putting in place a non-credit bearing Moodle ‘module’ or NOOC to supplement PGT supervision activity 23/24. Student visa holders will be required to engage with this activity in the virtual learning environment throughout the relevant period (June- August inclusive) and engagement will be monitored by the Visa and Immigration team. In partnership with University of Nottingham Libraries, this Moodle activity will be an adaptation of the existing On Course for your Masters module.

The first unit will be released on 10th June, and from there, new units will be released every 2 weeks, with the final units released on 19th August, making 6 releases in total. It is expected that each unit will take approximately 1 hour to complete, with some units considerably shorter than this.

# 1.5 What happens if a supervision meeting is missed and/or there are general concerns about a student’s lack of academic engagement?

Academic engagement evidence will be reviewed by the Visa and Immigration team in Registry and Academic Affairs. The Visa and Immigration team will contact student visa holders who have no evidence of engagement in any given month during the dissertation/ masters project period.

Cases of concern will usually trigger:

* further dialogue with an academic school/department about the situation
* a compulsory meeting for the student with the Visa and Immigration team to understand more about a student’s situation
* consideration of viable next steps

Wherever possible, a re-engagement action plan can be agreed. Appropriate support mechanisms will be discussed. Where immediate re-engagement is not possible for any reason, other options ranging from a voluntary interruption to withdrawal will be explored and discussed with the school/department, depending on the case.

Where a student does not engage at all for 60 days, the University is required to withdraw immigration sponsorship.

# 1.6 What if a student has a good reason for not attending or engaging, such as ECs?

From an immigration compliance perspective, ECs are not a substitute for engagement and if a student is struggling to engage for any reason, as their visa requires, an interruption of studies is usually the right course of action.

Please refer students for immigration advice from the Visa and Immigration team if there is any situation in which a student is unable to fully engage academically: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/internationalstudents/advisers](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/internationalstudents/advisers)

# 1.7 What are the key expectations for PGT Supervisors to be aware of from a UKVI academic engagement compliance perspective?

* The University of Nottingham must ensure the engagement of sponsored students throughout the period for which they are sponsored, which includes the masters project/dissertation phase.
* The PGT dissertation supervisor or their nominee must provide supervision meetings at least once per month to student visa holders where there is no simultaneous teaching activity (normally June – August inclusive). PGT supervision meetings should be scheduled at least every 4-5 weeks and gaps between meetings must not exceed 60 days.
* Unless the student has been given formal permission to study at a different location e.g. because of a specific personal request (see 1.9 about managing absence) or an academic course requirement, and this has been reported to the UKVI, PGT supervision meetings must be face-to-face and on campus.
* The PGT dissertation supervisor must provide an attendance QR code for the student to scan to confirm their attendance at the PGT dissertation meeting where that took place in person and must keep a separate record of any meetings which take place online in case this information is required as evidence at a Home Office audit.
* Where a student’s PGT dissertation supervisor is unable to meet with the student for any reason, such as staff annual leave, the student must be supported to meet with an alternative member of academic staff (a ‘nominee’) to discuss their dissertation.

# 1.8 What are the student’s responsibilities?

The student is responsible for engaging with their PGT dissertation supervisor and ensuring that they arrange and attend a monthly supervision meeting where there is no simultaneous teaching activity (normally June – August inclusive). PGT supervision meetings should be scheduled at least every 4-5 weeks and gaps between meetings must not exceed 60 days.

The student is responsible for fully engaging with set online activity in the virtual learning environment (Moodle) which supports their ability to demonstrate engagement during the dissertation/masters research project

The student is responsible for noting that the dissertation period still falls in term-time and for ensuring that any absence during the PGT masters project/ dissertation phase meets with the requirements of section 1.9

Students will be receiving separate communications and guidance directly.

# 1.9 How should we manage requests for absence from student visa holders during their masters project/dissertation period?

For immigration compliance purposes, absence should be defined as both:

* absence from teaching/research activity while in the UK and;
* absence from the UK, e.g. delayed return to the UK from vacation.

Normally, the maximum period of permitted absence for student visa holders during term-time is 2 weeks (10 working days).

Although the PGT masters project/dissertation is classed as term-time, it is possible to manage absence in exceptional circumstances outside of the 2 week limit given that there is no teaching activity.

Students are responsible for requesting and gaining approval for any such absence via the MS Form and process detailed here: <https://forms.office.com/e/BtNJisT9Yn>

As part of this process, students are asked to confirm that there is no objection from their academic school and that they will continue to work on their master project/dissertation during a limited period of absence from the UK which must not exceed 60 days. The Visa and Immigration team will be required to withdraw immigration sponsorship for students who are seeking absence which exceeds this.

We are asking for the support of the academic school/department in ensuring that staff in their academic unit are familiar with the limitations on absence for student visa holders and that staff refer relevant students to the requirement to request absence in the above way. Students will be receiving separate communications and guidance on this directly.

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