Student Engagement Policy

1. Introduction and Purpose

BIRD Conservatoire trains students for careers in the performing arts. That training is built on ensemble work: rehearsals, classes, productions and group sessions in which each student's presence and participation directly affects the learning and opportunities of their peers. A missing voice in a vocal ensemble, an absent dancer in a rehearsal, an actor not present for a scene call: each of these has an immediate impact on the people working alongside that student, not just on the absent student's own progress.

Attendance and engagement at BIRD are not simply administrative requirements. They are part of the professional standard BIRD trains its students to meet, and they reflect how the performing arts industry itself operates.

This policy sets out BIRD's expectations of students in relation to attendance, participation and communication, collectively referred to as engagement. It also sets out what students can expect from BIRD in return, how engagement is monitored and recorded, and the process that follows when concerns arise.

2. Scope and Definitions

This policy applies to all BIRD students across all programmes and all years of study, including students sponsored under a Student visa.

2.1. Engagement

Engagement has three connected elements, all of which matter equally:

a) Attendance: physical presence at timetabled sessions, including classes, rehearsals, ensemble work, tutorials and other scheduled academic activity.
b) Participation: active and meaningful involvement in learning, rehearsal and ensemble work while present.
c) Communication: proactively keeping BIRD informed when illness, personal circumstances or other factors affect a student's ability to attend or participate.

A student who is present but not genuinely participating, or who is absent without having communicated why, represents the same underlying concern: a breakdown in engagement. This policy treats both seriously.

2.2. Compulsory Sessions

All timetabled sessions are treated as compulsory unless stated otherwise by the relevant member of academic staff. This includes classes, rehearsals, ensemble and production activity, scheduled tutorials, and any session linked to group or collaborative work.

3. Expected Standard

BIRD expects 100% attendance and full participation from every student. This is consistent with the standard expected by other UK conservatoires and reflects the professional environment

students are training to enter. No professional production or company tolerates unexplained absence; BIRD's training should prepare students for that reality from the outset.

Stating 100% as the expected standard does not mean BIRD takes formal action every time a student misses a session. It means that BIRD's position is unambiguous, and that any absence is understood as a deviation from the expected norm rather than as an entitlement. Section 4 sets out the threshold at which formal concern is triggered, and section 5 explains how students should notify BIRD when they are unable to attend.

Punctuality is part of the expected standard. Students should aim for a 'call time' of at least ten minutes before the start time of class. Being on time means being ready to begin at the scheduled start time, not merely present in the building. Where a session involves physical preparation, this includes being changed into the correct clothes with the relevant equipment, warmed up and ready to work when the session starts. Persistent lateness, or arriving without the physical or practical preparation a session requires, is treated in the same way as partial absence under this policy.

Where a student arrives more than 15 minutes after the scheduled start time of a session, the member of staff delivering that session will mark the student as absent for that session.

Admission to a session in progress is at the discretion of the teaching staff member delivering it. A student arriving late may be refused entry to the session, particularly where late arrival would disrupt the group or where the student has missed content or preparation (such as a warm-up) necessary to participate safely or effectively.

4. Monitoring and the Formal Concern Threshold

Attendance is recorded for all students via Celcat. BIRD monitors attendance on an ongoing basis throughout the academic year.

Where a student's attendance falls below 85% across a term, this triggers a formal concern process under section 8. The 85% threshold applies after self-certified absences (section 5) have been taken into account.

The 85% threshold is a management trigger, not a target. A student attending consistently above 85% but showing a clear pattern of concern, for example through repeated short absences immediately before or after weekends or holiday periods, may still be referred into the process set out in section 8 at the discretion of the Executive Dean or their nominee.

5. Notifying Absence and Self-certification

Students are expected to notify BIRD of any absence by 9am on the day of the absence, using the absence notification process confirmed separately to students.

5.1. Self-certified Absence

Students may self-certify absences of up to seven consecutive days, including non-study days such as weekends and bank holidays, without providing medical or other evidence. Self-certification requires the student to notify BIRD of the absence and the general reason for it (for example, illness) by 9am as set out above.

Where a student self-certifies for more than two consecutive days, the Wellbeing Team may contact the student to check in and offer support.

There is no fixed limit on the number of self-certified absences a student may take within a term. However, where a student self-certifies a third absence within the same term, this triggers a pattern-of-concern review under section 8, regardless of the student's overall attendance percentage at that point. The purpose of this review is to understand whether there is an underlying issue, such as a health condition or personal circumstance, that would benefit from support.

5.2. Evidenced Absence

Absences of three or more consecutive days require supporting evidence, normally in the form of a medical certificate or equivalent documentation, submitted within five working days of the student's return.

5.3. Approved Absence

Absence for BIRD-approved external professional activity (such as auditions or approved industry engagements), or for reasons agreed in advance with the Executive Dean or their nominee, is recorded as approved absence and does not count against the thresholds in this policy. Students must seek approval in advance wherever possible.

5.4. Declared Needs and Extenuating Circumstances

Where a student has a declared disability, long-term health condition or other need affecting attendance, BIRD will work with the student to agree reasonable adjustments. Absence directly arising from an agreed adjustment is not treated as unexplained absence. Students should refer to the Extenuating Circumstances process for absence linked to significant personal disruption.

6. Student Visa Compliance

BIRD holds a Student visa sponsor licence. This section sets out the additional obligations that apply to students sponsored under a Student visa.

6.1. Legal Basis

BIRD is legally required by the Home Office to monitor and record the engagement of all sponsored students throughout their course, to maintain accurate records, and to report to the Home Office where a sponsored student's engagement falls below an acceptable level or where a student withdraws from their studies.

6.2. Application of This Policy

The attendance, participation and communication requirements set out in sections 2 to 5 of this policy apply equally to sponsored students. Self-certification is available to sponsored students on the same basis as all other students. However, the attendance and engagement records of sponsored students are monitored and reported separately, in line with BIRD's sponsor duties, and are subject to the reporting timelines set out in the UKVI Sponsor Compliance Policy.

6.3. Consequences of Non-engagement

Sponsored students should be aware that sustained non-engagement, including failure to attend, failure to respond to contact from BIRD, or withdrawal from study, may result in BIRD being legally required to report this to the Home Office. This can have immigration consequences for the student, including curtailment of their visa. This is independent of, and in addition to, any academic process under section 8 of this policy.

7. Monitoring Period

Attendance monitoring for all students, including sponsored students, continues throughout the full academic year, including for students in their final year of study. Where scheduled activity is replaced by production work, this is coded accordingly in Celcat and does not constitute a gap in monitoring.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibility for engagement is shared across the academic community. The roles below are defined by function rather than by job title.

Function	Responsibility
Personal tutors and Learning and Wellbeing Officers	First point of pastoral contact. Responsible for noticing changes in a student's attendance or participation, having an early and supportive conversation with the student, and referring to the Dean of Students where a pattern of concern is identified.
Dean of Students	Leads the formal stages of the engagement process: agreeing re-engagement plans with students, monitoring compliance, and, where a plan is not met, preparing and submitting the case to the Student Engagement Panel.
Student Engagement Panel	Considers cases referred under Stage 3 of section 8 and makes the final decision on whether a student is withdrawn. Chaired by the Executive Dean.
Registry / Admissions	Responsible for the operation of Celcat as the system of record and for UKVI reporting under section 6.

Academic staff more broadly, including those without a formal pastoral role, are expected to notice and flag changes in a student's engagement to the personal tutor or Dean of Students. Early identification of disengagement is part of the academic community's shared responsibility and is not solely a registry function.

9. Concern and Escalation Process

This process applies where a student's attendance falls below the threshold in section 4, where a pattern-of-concern review is triggered under section 5.1, or where a member of staff raises a concern about participation or communication. Each stage is intended as an opportunity to understand the underlying cause and support the student back into full engagement.

9.1. Stage 1: Early Contact

The personal tutor or Learning and Wellbeing Officer makes contact with the student within five working days of the concern being identified. This is an informal, supportive conversation to understand the cause of reduced engagement and agree any immediate support needed. A brief note of the conversation and its outcome is recorded; this is not a formal warning.

Stage 1 is bypassed, and the case moves directly to Stage 2, where the student has had no contact with BIRD for ten consecutive working days, or where there is a safeguarding concern.

9.2. Stage 2: Formal Engagement Review

Where Stage 1 does not resolve the concern within four working weeks, or where a case enters directly under the bypass condition above, the Dean of Students holds a formal review meeting with the student. The student may bring a support person to this meeting.

The outcome is a written, time-bound re-engagement plan agreed with the student, setting out specific and measurable conditions the student must meet (for example, no further unauthorised absence within a defined period). The student is informed in writing that failure to meet the plan will result in automatic referral to the Student Engagement Panel under Stage 3.

9.3. Stage 3: Student Engagement Panel

Where the conditions of a Stage 2 re-engagement plan are not met, the Dean of Students submits the full case record, including the Stage 1 note, the Stage 2 plan and evidence of non-compliance, to the Student Engagement Panel. Referral at this point is automatic.

The Student Engagement Panel is chaired by the Executive Dean and includes two further members of staff, at least one of whom is an academic, neither of whom has had prior involvement in the case. Where the case concerns a student sponsored under a Student visa, the panel also includes a member with expertise in Student visa compliance.

The panel considers the full case record and the student's own representations, and decides whether the student is withdrawn from their course. This is the final stage of the process under this policy; outcomes are not referred to the exam board.

A student may appeal the panel's decision through BIRD's standard appeals process.

10. Engagement and Academic Decision-making

Engagement concerns that do not result in referral to the Student Engagement Panel, for example where a Stage 2 plan is met successfully, are not held against a student in subsequent academic decision-making. Where a case is referred to and decided by the Student Engagement Panel, that decision stands on its own and is not separately considered by the exam board.

11. What Students Can Expect From BIRD

This policy sets out expectations of students. BIRD also has obligations in return, and meeting them is part of what makes these expectations reasonable:

a) Timetables will be published with reasonable notice ahead of each term.

b) Assessment periods will be communicated before the start of the academic year wherever possible.

c) The engagement process set out in section 8 will be applied transparently and consistently across all programmes.

d) Wellbeing and student support will be actively offered, not just made available on request, at every formal stage of this policy.

e) Reasonable adjustments will be made for students with declared disabilities, health conditions or other support needs, in line with BIRD's obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

12. Document Control

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Related documents:	UKVI Sponsor Guidance Support to Study Policy Extenuating Circumstances Policy Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy		
Documents replaced:	Attendance Policy		
Notes:	Reframed from attendance to engagement (attendance, participation, communication). 100% expected standard stated separately from the 85% management threshold. Self-certification introduced. Year 3 exemption removed; monitoring now continues throughout the year. Roles defined by function, not job title. Escalation rebuilt as a three-stage process ending in referral to a new Student Engagement Panel, which replaces exam board referral and prior sanction stages.		