

## **POLICY FOR SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SAP) FOR STUDENT RECEIVING FEDERAL STUDENT AID**

### **1. Overview:**

Students in receipt of Title IV funding ("Federal Student Aid"), as certified by Birkbeck College in accordance with the US Department of Education's federal loans programmes, are required to be in good standing and to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress toward their degree requirements for each academic year in which they are enrolled.

The standards used to measure Satisfactory Academic Progress are explained below and students must pass both the qualitative and quantitative measures to be considered as making Satisfactory Academic Progress. Quantitative measures include Pace of Completion and Maximum Timeframe. These standards apply to undergraduate and postgraduate students in receipt of Federal Student Aid and studying at Birkbeck on full-time and part-time programmes. Distance Learning courses are not eligible for Federal Student Aid.

Satisfactory Academic Progress is assessed at least three times a year for all programmes, at the end of each payment period (i.e. each academic term).

### **2. Qualitative Measures of Progress:**

Birkbeck, as a UK Higher Education institution, does not use Grade Point Average (GPA) assessments. Students are required to achieve the following results to pass individual modules (including dissertations).

Undergraduate students:	40% minimum
Postgraduate students:	50% minimum

In addition, some programmes will require students to pass specific modules in order to facilitate their progression on the course. These will be outlined in the relevant programme specification.

Non-credit bearing optional assessments, where offered by programmes, will not be taken into consideration as part of this measure.

If a student is enrolled on a course longer than 2 academic years, at the end of the second academic year the student must have achieved at least a predicted 'Pass' grade by achieving the marks above across all of the modules they have taken.

The qualitative standards for Federal Student Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress are the same as Birkbeck's academic progress standards for all other students (i.e. those not receiving Federal Student Aid). Birkbeck's standards can be found in the College's [Common Awards Scheme](#) and the relevant academic [programme specification](#).

### **3. Quantitative Measures of Progress:**

All academic programmes at Birkbeck have a published length of study. In order to be considered as making Satisfactory Academic Progress, students in receipt of Federal Student Aid must be in a position to complete the course within **the maximum timeframe** stipulated in this policy. For all taught students, this is 150% of the published length of study.

The published length of study for undergraduate degrees is usually 3 years for full-time study, 4 years for part-time study, and 6 years for decelerated routes.

The published length of study for postgraduate degrees (Masters programmes) is usually 1 year for full-time study and 2 years for part-time study.

Students studying doctoral degrees must complete their study within the maximum timeframe permitted for registration as per [Birkbeck's regulations for research degrees](#). This is usually up to 4 years for full-time study and up to 7 years for part-time study.

It should be noted that American students are usually ineligible to study Part-time or Decelerated route programmes at all qualification levels due to current UK visa restrictions.

Students must also be progressing at an acceptable pace. The pace of completion is measured by the number of credits required to complete the programme and achieve the qualification, multiplied by the maximum timeframe (150%). This value is divided by the original value to give the required pace of completion. For example:

An undergraduate programme requires 360 credits for the qualification to be awarded, and its published length of study is 3 years.

$360 \times 150\% = 540$  attempted credits (**maximum timeframe**)

$360/540 = 67\%$  (**pace of completion**) students must be attending and submitting work at this pace or above to meet this standard.

At each evaluation point, a student must be on track to complete 67% of the annual standard credit load by the end of the academic year:

$120 \times 67\% = 80$  credits per year.

Please note that the pace of completion does not apply to students on doctoral degrees who are subject to the [standard regulations for Research Degrees](#).

The quantitative standards for Federal Student Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress may be stricter than those applied to other students (i.e. those not receiving Federal Student Aid) as the US Department of Education requirements have priority for these students. Birkbeck's standard can be found in the College's [Common Awards Scheme](#) and the relevant academic programme specification.

#### **4. Evaluating Progress:**

For all Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate programmes Academic Progress will be evaluated three times over the academic year: in December (at the end of the Autumn Term payment period); in March (the end of Spring Term payment period); and at the end of the academic year (the end of the Summer Term payment period, usually in August/September). For Doctoral students, Academic

Progress will be evaluated twice during the academic year: towards the end of the first payment period (after approx. 5 months of study) and at the end of the academic year (the end of the second payment period) .

Evaluation during the academic year will be performed before the following terms' disbursement of Federal Student Aid.

As the evaluation at the end of the Summer Term is also the end of the academic year this evaluation will affect the first disbursement period of any following academic year. This will affect all students studying an academic programme over multiple academic years, including programmes with a published length of study of two or more years and students required to repeat modules in a subsequent academic year in order to graduate or progress on their programme.

To pass the qualitative measure of progress students must have passed all module assessments taken in the relevant payment period; where no assessments have been taken progress is assessed on the relevant academic department's predictions (pass or fail) for upcoming assessments. Predictions will be based on a number of factors including attendance, engagement on the course, and submission of any assignments (including formative assignments).

Where programmes do not involve regular assessments (such as PhDs) students' work is monitored by an academic supervisor and subject to an annual review before a final assessment (such as a dissertation or *viva voce*). The qualitative measure is therefore based upon the relevant academic department's predictions of the student's performance in the annual review or final assessment as relevant. Predictions will be based on a number of factors including engagement on the course and submission of any regular progress reports.

To pass the quantitative measure of progress students must have achieved sufficient credits in the relevant payment period to demonstrate that they will achieve the qualification within the published length of study, or be predicted by their academic department to achieve sufficient credits in line with the predictions for the qualitative measures.

Where qualifications are not awarded on credit (such as PhDs) the quantitative measure is based upon the relevant academic department's predictions of the student's ability to achieve the qualification within the published length of study, in line with the predictions for the qualitative measures.

## **5. Academic Situations that may affect Qualitative and/or Quantitative measurements:**

### *5i. Incompletes:*

If a student fails to complete a mandatory assessment this may result in them failing that module, subject to the relevant programme specification. This will be considered as part of the qualitative measurement and may result in the student being evaluated as not making Satisfactory Academic Progress.

### *5ii. Retaking assessments:*

Where a student fails an assessment they may be provided an opportunity to re -take that assessment later in the same academic year. This is permissible within this Satisfactory Academic Progress policy however the student may still be assessed as not meeting the qualitative measure when the assessment is originally failed and be placed on a Financial Aid Warning (see **Financial Aid Warning**

below). In this case the student must have passed, or be predicted to pass, the retake by the next SAP evaluation in addition to any other assessments that may normally be due. Retaking assessments the same academic year will not have any immediate effect on the quantitative measure of progress but may be taken into consideration for the final assessments in the relevant academic year.

#### *5iii. Retaking individual modules*

Where a student fails a module they may be provided with an opportunity to repeat the entire module the following academic year, at the discretion of the relevant academic department. This is permissible within this Satisfactory Academic Progress policy however the published length of study will not be extended by an additional year where single modules are being retaken alongside other modules. This will therefore affect both the qualitative and quantitative measurements of SAP. Students may still be placed on a Financial Aid Warning (see **Financial Aid Warning** below), based on their original academic progress, which will be lifted assuming that the student is making Satisfactory Academic Progress by the following evaluation.

#### *5iv. Retaking full academic years:*

Where a student fails a full academic year (e.g. through failing the majority of individual modules) they may be provided with an opportunity to repeat the entire year in the following academic year, at the discretion of the relevant academic department. This is permissible within this Satisfactory Academic Progress policy, however this will not increase the published length of study. This will therefore affect both the qualitative and quantitative measurements of SAP. Students may still be placed on a Financial Aid Warning (see **Financial Aid Warning** below), based on their original academic progress, which will be lifted assuming that the student is making Satisfactory Academic Progress by the following evaluation. It is likely however that a student will already failed to meet SAP requirements several times throughout the course of the academic year and may already be subject to **Financial Aid Termination**.

#### *5v. Deferral of assessment*

Academic departments may allow students to defer an assessment to a later term or academic year (usually following an accepted [Mitigating Circumstances request](#)). Deferred assessments will not be considered as part of the SAP assessment for the payment period they were originally due and will instead be assessed for the payment period they were deferred to. Where a deferred assessment causes a student to exceed the published length of study this is permissible within this SAP policy and the published length of study will be considered extended by the relevant time.

#### *5vi. 'Examination-only' status:*

Where students are required to re-take an assessment element only (e.g. re-sit an examination) before progressing on their programme and attendance at class is not required the student will be considered as enrolled on an 'Examinations-only' basis. This is not a full enrolment and is considered as 'less than half time' study under US Department of Education regulations. Examinations-only students are not eligible for any Federal Student Aid for the duration of the Examinations-only enrolment (usually one full academic year) and the Satisfactory Academic Progress policy will therefore not apply. This period will also not be considered in either the qualitative or quantitative evaluations.

#### *5vii. Credit transfer:*

Students may receive academic credit or exemption from some modules due to previous study at Birkbeck or another Higher Education institution, at the discretion of the relevant academic department. Any credit/exemption achieved in this way will not be counted as the equivalent of credit achieved through normal study on the programme however the credit amount will be deducted from the total required to meet the quantitative measures (e.g. 30 credits exemption awarded would result in a 120 credit requirements being decreased to 90 credits).

#### *5viii. Interruptions / Breaks in Study*

Students may take a break in their studies (also called an Interruption) subject to the [relevant policy](#). Students on a Break in Studies are not considered enrolled and are not eligible for Federal Student Aid for the duration of the Break and the Satisfactory Academic Progress policy will therefore not apply. A Break in Studies will not be counted as time studying on the programme so will not be considered in future qualitative or quantitative evaluations.

#### *Withdrawal:*

If a student withdraws from a module any marks gained will no longer be considered in the Satisfactory Academic Progress evaluation unless the marks are transferred to an alternative module. Withdrawal from a module may also affect the student's pace of study depending upon the point in the year that the withdrawal is completed and whether an alternative module is registered. Where the student has registered on a new module in place of the withdrawn module, the replacement module will be used in all future Satisfactory Academic Progress evaluations and the withdrawn module will be disregarded.

#### *5ix. Mitigating circumstances for poor academic progress:*

Where a student fails the qualitative and/or quantitative measures but the academic department has approved a formal [Mitigating Circumstances request](#) for an assessment and/or module, the relevant assessment/module results will be disregarded from the SAP evaluation providing the mitigating circumstances claim has been approved by the time of the evaluation. Mitigating circumstances claims in progress or approved after the evaluation will not be taken into consideration and students may still be placed on Financial Aid Warning (see **Financial Aid Warning** below) or Financial Aid Termination. Such situations can however be used as the basis of an appeal against Financial Aid Termination (see **Appeal Process** below).

#### *5x. Compensated Fails / Compensated Passes:*

Some modules and programmes allow a student to fail an element or module but still be considered a pass overall, where other marks are sufficient to demonstrate the relevant academic requirements. If a student is considered to be failing either the qualitative and quantitative element of SAP but the academic department has advised that a compensated mark is likely the student may be assessed as still making SAP overall. Note that it is possible for a student to be treated as failing SAP and being placed on a Financial Aid Warning first, as compensated marks will not usually be available until the majority of the module or programme has been completed in order to provide a more realistic prediction of students overall academic attainment.

## **6. Evaluation Result:**

All students that meet the qualitative and quantitative requirements to be considered as making Satisfactory Academic Progress will be entitled to receive Federal Student Aid funding administered by Birkbeck until the next evaluation.

All students that fail to meet either the qualitative and quantitative requirements will be placed on a Financial Aid Warning. Students will be notified of a Financial Aid Warning within 5 working days of the relevant evaluation.

If, at any time, it becomes impossible for the student to complete their programme within the maximum time allowed their eligibility for Federal Student Aid administered by Birkbeck will be terminated.

## **7. Financial Aid Warnings:**

A student placed on Financial Aid Warning will still be entitled to Federal Student Aid funding for at least the following payment period.

A Financial Aid Warning is not permanent and may be withdrawn providing that the student is making Satisfactory Academic Progress at the next evaluation period.

A Financial Aid Warning does not affect a student's ability to attend college and will have no bearing on a student's academic results (e.g. the grade of degree awarded).

A Financial Aid Warning cannot be appealed.

Birkbeck's International Student Administration office will be notified of all students placed on Financial Aid Warning as this may affect the student's immigration/visa status.

## **8. Financial Aid Termination:**

Students placed on Financial Aid Warning must be making Satisfactory Academic Progress at the next evaluation or their eligibility for Federal Student Aid administered through Birkbeck will be terminated.

Students cannot be placed on a Financial Aid Warning for two consecutive periods.

Students will be notified of the termination of their eligibility for Federal Student Aid funding administered through Birkbeck within 5 working days of the relevant evaluation. The termination notice will include details of how to appeal the termination.

Students will be liable to pay any remaining tuition fees and/or living costs as appropriate.

Birkbeck's International Student Administration office will be notified of the termination of a student's Federal Student Aid as this may affect the student's immigration/visa status.

## **9. Appeal Process:**

A student may not appeal being placed on Financial Aid Warning.

A student may appeal Financial Aid Termination within 30 calendar days of receiving notification of termination where they believe exceptional circumstances have prevented them making Satisfactory Academic Progress.

Exceptional circumstances may include death or serious illness of an immediate family member, or serious illness or injury of the student. This is not an exhaustive list and other acceptable circumstances will be determined by the Director of Registry Operations.

Appeals must be presented as a formal statement explaining the exceptional circumstances and must include relevant official documentation to support the appeal.

Appeals will not be considered on the strength of a student's formal statement alone and students must demonstrate their exceptional circumstances with relevant official documentation, such as a doctor's note or death certificate. Documentation does not have to be an original, however it must be a legible copy (e.g. photocopy or scanned document) and the original document must be available on request.

Appeals must be made in writing to:

The Director of Registry Operations,  
Birkbeck, University of London  
Malet Street, WC1E 7HX

Telephone appeals will not be accepted.

All appeals will be acknowledged by email within 24 hours of the appeals being received.

### **10. Appeal outcome:**

Appeals will be considered by the Director of Registry Operations and appellants will receive a decision within 14 days of the appeal being received.

Federal Student Aid funding will not be disbursed while an appeal is being considered.

#### ***10i. Successful appeals:***

Following a successful appeal the student will be placed on a Financial Aid Probation.

Students on Financial Aid Probation will be required to subscribe to an academic plan created between them and their academic department that ensures that the student can return to Satisfactory Academic Progress as soon as reasonably possible. Provided that they meet the requirements of the academic plan they will be considered as making Satisfactory Academic Progress at the next evaluation and they will continue to be eligible for Federal Student Aid as normal until the next SAP evaluation.

Following a successful appeal Federal Student Aid funding will be re-instated as soon as is practicably possible after an academic plan has been agreed. Students will be informed of the expected date of any funding disbursement that will be made outside the timescale stated in their original loan notification letter.

Eligibility for Federal Student Aid administered through Birkbeck will be terminated if a student on Financial Aid Probation is not meeting the requirements of their academic plan at the next SAP evaluation. Students may be able to further appeal this termination under section 9 of this policy if new exceptional circumstances have prevented them from meeting the requirements of their plan.

*10ii. Unsuccessful appeals:*

Following an unsuccessful appeal the appellant's Financial Aid will remain terminated, and they will be liable to pay any remaining tuition fees and/or living costs as appropriate.

The Director of Registry Operations' decision in relation to a Satisfactory Academic Progress appeal is final although the student may still have recourse through Birkbeck's [Student Complaints Policy and Procedure](#).