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Eden Centre for Education  
Enhancement

# Declining Lecture Attendance at LSE

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### Abstract

Declining lecture attendance represents a significant challenge across LSE (as well as higher education generally). This report examines the prevalence, contributing factors and possible policy responses to this phenomenon. It draws on a comprehensive survey of academic staff across 25 departments at LSE, insights from a Student Education Panel, two LSESU-run focus groups and literature review.

Thematic analysis revealed three distinct paradigms shaping institutional responses: **Enhancement** (improving lecture quality and engagement), **Enforcement** (mandatory attendance and recording restrictions), and **Adaptation** (flexible delivery acknowledging changing student needs). However, our survey also highlights that the issue is perceived very differently across LSE, with post-graduate courses in particular reporting fewer concerns to begin with.

The report also finds contrasting attempts at explaining this decline in attendance. While academics' views tend to view non-attendance as driven by the availability of lecture recordings, generational differences, and lack of maturity by students, students' perspectives and literature findings tend to frame non-attendance as deliberate choices based on the perceived value of attendance and constraints such as cost, timetabling and commuting distances. For students, the quality of the lecture and structural barriers around it are at the core of the attendance problem: small perceived benefits from attending lectures are juxtaposed with substantial (opportunity) costs and barriers.

Our results further indicate that even where departments consider themselves to have implemented the kind of enhancements students have proposed (including for content, style and relevance), attendance improvements remain minimal. This paradox coexists with significant faculty exhaustion and uncertainty, with 95% of respondents advocating for some policy change. The report also identifies substantial inter- and intra-departmental variation, possibly suggesting a lack of institution-wide responses or sharing of existing practices.

Together, findings suggest that improving attendance may require more than implementing student-preferred teaching methods. Possible institutional actions subsequently include developing discipline-specific interventions rather than universal policies, addressing root causes (economic pressures, scheduling, a clear pedagogic 'value proposition' of lectures) rather than symptoms, and reconceptualising attendance as one pathway to learning, rather than an essential requirement – underpinned by enhanced data collection and measurement of impact.

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## Executive Summary: Declining Lecture Attendance at LSE

This report examines declining lecture attendance at LSE, based on a survey of 165 academics from 25 departments, three student focus groups with 32 participants, and a comprehensive literature review.

### Dimensions and Contributing Factors for Declining Attendance

Our data suggests differences in the scale of the issue based on teaching level, with post-graduate teaching seemingly less affected by declining attendance. This divide may be reflective of different student characteristics (mature, professionally oriented students with clearer motivations). Where attendance is declining, we find substantial *inter- and intra-departmental* variation in responses.

Our analysis further highlights differing explanations for declining attendance put forth by staff and students. Academics' perspectives emphasise the availability of lecture recordings, perceived deficits in student motivation, and generational shifts in learning preferences. Students frame their attendance decisions as cost-benefit calculations, emphasising the importance of lecture quality, relevance to assessment, and constraints including commuting costs and paid work. Underlying these divergent perspectives is perhaps a more fundamental uncertainty, where neither staff nor students share an understanding of the educational value that lectures (rather than recordings or seminars) provide.

### Current Responses

In response to declining attendance, many academics described making changes to their lecture style and format. These changes, broadly, fell into three paradigms:

- **Enhancement Paradigm (39% of responses):** Focusing on improving lecture quality through interactive elements, contemporary contextualisation, community building initiatives, and value-added experiences that cannot be replicated through recordings
- **Enforcement Paradigm (18% of responses):** Implementing 'Harvard-style' discussions in lectures with participation grades, recording restrictions, and exclusive in-person content to compel attendance through direct and indirect consequences
- **Adaptation Paradigm (7% of responses):** Reimagines educational delivery through flexible modes, flipped classroom approaches, hybrid options, and format innovations that acknowledge contemporary student realities

Despite such changes, evidence of effectiveness remains limited. Only a few interventions were anecdotally reported to improve attendance, including scheduling seminars and lectures on the same day, clearer alignment between lecture content and assessments, and in some cases, hybrid delivery. Instead, most academics report that even intensive enhancement efforts, aligned with student-stated preferences, produce minimal improvement. This has generated significant frustration: 95% percent of surveyed academics express a preference for attendance policy changes – despite significant uncertainty about what might make a difference.

### Key Themes

Existing variation across departments indicates that universal policies may be unsuitable, as courses prioritising knowledge transmission face fundamentally different challenges from those emphasising collaborative learning. Differences in under- and post-graduate teaching further underscore the need for nuanced policies.

Nonetheless, academics expressed strong support for addressing this decline by making the positive case for lecture attendance (ie encouraging students to attend for their own benefit) or making lecture attendance

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mandatory. Least preferred policies included facilitating other modes of lecture delivery (such as 'flipped classrooms') and *inaction*. Key factors explaining these diverse preferences included expected efficacy, concerns about workload in making changes or enforcing new rules, and conflicting views on student agency – with colleagues holding contrasting views on their responsibility to ensure, or even enforce, attendance.

Our data further highlights cases where departments have implemented strategies matching student-stated preferences without seeing attendance improve. This gap could be explained in several ways: students' self-reported preferences may not accurately reflect the factors that influence attendance decisions, or there may be substantive differences in how academics and students understand improvements such as 'interactive teaching' or 'lecture quality'. This, along with the weakness of evidence on what works, underscores a need for improved data collection and structured sharing of good practice across departments.

### Considerations for Future Development

At the institutional level, our findings suggest value in developing coherent attendance and lecture-recording policies that allow appropriate departmental flexibility whilst setting clear expectations for students and academics. Changes to timetabling and teaching spaces to allow interactive pedagogical approaches merit consideration, as does improved evidence gathering and practice sharing across departments. However, transforming existing infrastructure and re-organising timetables is likely to require significant time and resources.

Departmental responses might also benefit from discipline-specific interventions based on their respective pedagogical approach and student populations. The evidence suggests that addressing structural barriers may be as important as pedagogical enhancement, and that articulating the value of lectures for specific courses – alongside adapting teaching to realise this value – could positively influence student attendance.

For academics, the identified gap between self-perception and student experience of teaching quality suggests possible value in professional development opportunities, particularly in areas consistently highlighted by student feedback. This would require resources and support from academic developers, and, most likely, also work with academics to emphasise the need for change in the first place. Similarly, supporting students in understanding the long-term implications of their (non-)attendance on learning outcomes and professional development could inform more strategic engagement choices.

Ultimately, our analysis underscores the need for a clearer, more constructive alignment of students' and academics' understanding of the pedagogical value of lectures, in contrast to available alternatives – with this value being actualised by tailored policies and effective teaching practices.

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### 1 Introduction

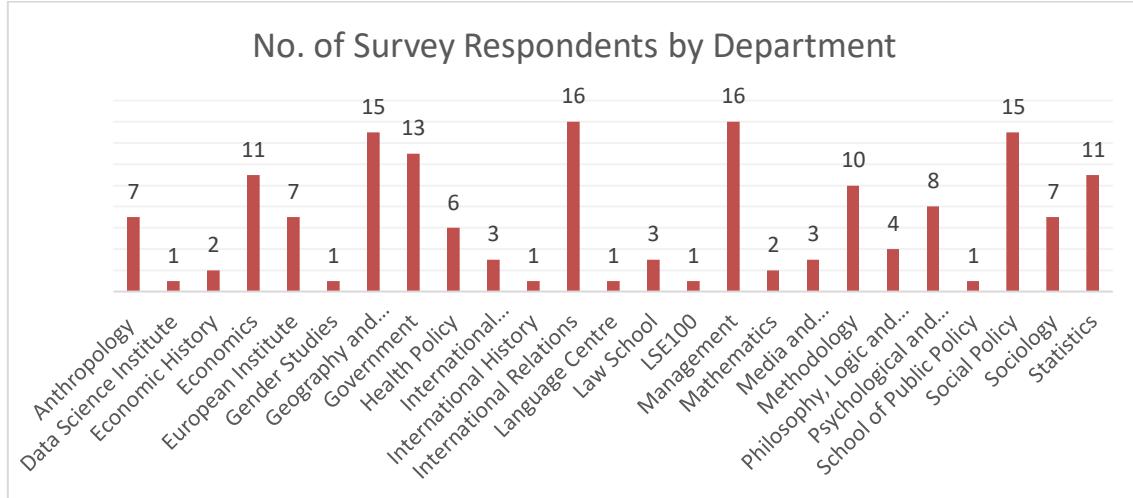
Lecture attendance in higher education institutions has experienced a marked decline over the past decade. Recent data reveals the severity of this trend: a Times Higher Education ([2022](#)) survey found that 76% of academics globally felt that class attendance was lower than before the pandemic.

Across LSE, teaching staff have also voiced growing concern about declining lecture attendance. Despite this, there has been limited consensus on causes, solutions, or the institutional support needed to address the issue. Equally, many departments have already implemented attendance strategies, yet evidence on their effectiveness and impact remains limited. This report summarises emerging insights from staff, literature, and student perspectives on this issue, attempting to outline possible policy options to address these challenges going forward.

#### 1.1 Data

The data underpinning this report comprises four sources: (1) a review of literature conducted by Dr. Jenni Carr<sup>1</sup> and Mark Baltovic<sup>2</sup> (Eden); (2) a thematic analysis of concerns raised by 8 students (UG and PGT) during a Student Education Panel (SEP) held in May 2025; (3) two focus group discussions with 24 students about declining lecture attendance which took place in June 2025, facilitated by LSESU; and (4) an institution-wide survey on academic perspectives on the issue, which received 165 responses from 25 departments (s. Figure 1), including Full Professors (36%), Associate Professors (33%), Assistant Professors, (18%), Fellows (8%) and GTAs (4%).

*Figure 1 Responses by Department*



#### 1.2 Why does declining attendance matter?

Student absenteeism is a widespread problem across higher education. However, establishing why (and if) declining attendance *matters* (and for *whom*) requires careful consideration. Rather than presuming crisis, we might ask: what, educational value, if any, is compromised when students opt out of physical attendance?

According to the survey (Q1), academics conceptualise lectures as fulfilling four primary functions:

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- **Knowledge transfer and contextualisation (mentioned by 56% of responses<sup>3</sup>):** lectures are considered as providing conceptual scaffolding through foundational overviews, facilitating understanding of complex concepts, and connecting academic content to contemporary real-world debates.
- **Interactive learning (mentioned by 10% of responses):** lectures enable peer relationship development, social connections, and provide platforms for immediate clarification through direct dialogue with lecturers.
- **Critical thinking and research skills development (mentioned by 10% of responses):** lectures are believed to cultivate independent research capabilities, encouraging students to adopt analytical and critical thinking approaches.
- **Community building and engagement (mentioned by 9% of responses):** maintaining regular staff-student contact and fostering a sense of shared academic community by identifying and emphasising connections across module topics and materials.

Prior research on the relationship between attendance and performance presents mixed findings, however. On one side, Edwards and Clinton<sup>4</sup> (2018) demonstrated that attendance predicts higher attainment even when controlling for students' previous grades and gender, with lecture capture viewing failing to compensate for the impact that low attendance has on attainment. Barlow and Fleischer<sup>5</sup> (2011) similarly observed that students with poor attendance often fell behind in their studies. Yet despite growing awareness of this issue, they posit that factors ranging from readily available online materials to changing student demographics and work commitments continue to drive lower lecture attendance. In contrast, Doggrell<sup>6</sup> (2020), found no apparent association between lecture attendance or accessing lecture recordings and academic outcomes in a medical science (lab) course. This suggests the relationship between attendance and achievement may be mediated by alternative factors – such as student motivation and quality of lectures and alternative resources, among others.

Hence, the extent to which non-attendance undermines these functions merits further examination. For instance, students participating in LSE Student Education Panels pointed out that learning for certain quantitative tasks was aided by lecturer records, where self-paced study allowed them to rewind or slow down the instructions. Conversely, declining attendance may significantly affect the educational objectives of departments who consider interactive learning as key to comprehension and academic success.

## 2 Scoping the Problem: Dimensions of Declining Attendance

### 2.1 Who sees declining attendance as a problem?

The perception of declining attendance as problematic varies significantly across academic departments, possibly reflecting distinct student profiles, pedagogical philosophies and educational priorities.

Foremost, survey data from this study suggests a possible distinction between undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, with the latter generally reporting less concern about attendance patterns.

<sup>3</sup> In total, 165 individuals answered this question, with each answer on average containing 2.5 codes. Minor themes not reported in the main text include lectures as 'non-negotiable' part of the discipline (4.6% of responses), lectures as establishing foundational connections in the content (4.6%), lectures as supporting and framing readings (3.5% of responses), and other (2.1%).

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, M.R., Clinton, M.E. A study exploring the impact of lecture capture availability and lecture capture usage on student attendance and attainment. *High Educ* 77, 403–421 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0275-9>

<sup>5</sup> Barlow, J., & Fleischer, S. (2011). Student absenteeism: whose responsibility? *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 48(3), 227–237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2011.593700>

<sup>6</sup> Doggrell S. A. (2020). No apparent association between lecture attendance or accessing lecture recordings and academic outcomes in a medical laboratory science course. *BMC medical education*, 20(1), 207. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02066-9>

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Specifically, postgraduate departments showed mixed responses, though some (particularly International Development and Gender Studies) appeared less concerned about declining attendance, adopting stances that recognised their students' competing professional commitments and capacity for self-directed learning. Knowles et al. (2014)<sup>7</sup> offer a potential explanation for why these PG only departments may report less concern about declining attendance: Knowles' concept of Andragogy posits that adult learners are internally motivated and goal-oriented, characteristics that are particularly relevant to postgraduate programmes that attract students with strong intrinsic motivation and clear professional objectives. Students pursuing International Development or Gender Studies at postgraduate level typically enter these programmes with specific career goals (eg. in NGOs, policy work, research, or advocacy), and established commitments to their fields of study. This internal motivation, combined with the professional relevance of their studies to immediate career trajectories, may result in more consistent attendance vis-à-vis undergraduate programmes.

However, among respondents that reported declining attendance – and considered it a problem – we found four distinct conceptions of why declining lecture attendance is an issue:

### Attendance as a pedagogical necessity

Some respondents frame low attendance as a fundamental pedagogical challenge, positing that engaging teaching becomes impossible in empty rooms. These colleagues emphasise that interactive pedagogical approaches – such as group discussions, real-time problem-solving, and collaborative learning – require a critical number of participants. The absence of students creates negative externalities that affect both instructors and attending students, undermining the dynamic exchange that characterises effective teaching. Paradoxically, some of the instructors that prioritise interactive teaching methods report larger frustration with declining attendance, advocating for mandatory lecture attendance.



*Providing students with an overview of a broad field of knowledge in which they can situate their personal interests and reading; opening new frontiers of questioning and conversation for them; inspiring them to think about how the perspectives they are learning in the course could be applied to real-world issues.<sup>8</sup>*

### Community building

For colleagues conceptualising lectures as community building spaces, physical presence is deemed irreplaceable. They view the lecture hall as more than a site of information transfer; it serves as a forum for collective intellectual engagement where students develop professional networks, engage in peer learning, and participate in the social dimensions of academic life. From this perspective, declining attendance erodes the collaborative culture essential to disciplines where professional socialisation and peer interaction form integral components of the educational experience.



*The problem is severe. We have a large proportion (i.e. 75%+) of students who do not show up to lectures at all. The effects on the classroom experience for those who show up is detrimental, but most importantly, the students who fail to attend miss the opportunity to enrich their knowledge and their connections to their colleagues. This shows up in the grades. A significant proportion of*

<sup>7</sup> Knowles, M. S., Holton III, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2014). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*. Routledge.

<sup>8</sup> Respondent from the Department of Anthropology

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*students lag behind as they leave the study to April, and then find that they cannot catch up<sup>9</sup>. *

### **Concerns about learning outcomes**

A third category comprises academics that evaluate attendance through the lens of learning outcomes and objectives. Here, respondents described their systematic consideration of how weekly lecture attendance contributes to specified educational goals, adopting a student-centred approach that prioritises measurable academic achievement. For them, the attendance question becomes empirical: does physical presence in lectures demonstrably enhance student performance against defined learning outcomes? This perspective shifts the debate from assumptions about attendance value to evidence-based assessment of its impact on student success.



*Lectures play an important role in introducing the weekly topic and connecting it to class discussions, assessments, and the intended learning outcomes (ILOs)... there is a noticeable difference between students who attend lectures and those who do not. Typically, students who miss lectures do not catch up before attending class, which affects their engagement and understanding. Allowing students skipping lectures not only weakens the overall effectiveness of teaching in relation to the ILOs but also places additional strain on the whole teaching team<sup>10</sup>. *

### **Existential concerns**

Perhaps most fundamentally, some respondents express concern about what degrees signify in the absence of traditional lecture engagement. For them, lectures are viewed as definitional to the university experience – not only as pedagogical tools but as essential components that defines higher education. Declining attendance hence raises profound questions about academic standards, the meaning of university credentials, and the fundamental nature of the educational contract between institutions and students. Their concern extends beyond practical considerations to philosophical questions about the purpose and value of university education itself.



*I see lectures as fundamental to all kinds of university learning. I have never understood why the LSE values lectures so little, and creates institutional pathways for students to skip lecture -- sometimes all lectures -- by allowing students to enrol in clashing lectures and preventing instructors from using lecture attendance and participation as part of marking criteria. It's as if we weren't all professional educators...<sup>11</sup> *

## 2.2 What are the potential causes?

### **Academic Perspectives**

From a thematic analysis of responses across the survey (Q1, Q2, Q4, Q5), we find academic staff most commonly attribute declining attendance to four interconnected factors:

- **Technological Disruption:** According to academics, lecture recordings, originally introduced as accessibility tools, have fundamentally altered student behaviour. Students now treat recordings as attendance substitutes, preferring asynchronous consumption over live participation.
- **Lack of Motivation and/or Incentives:** Many respondents suggest that attendance is declining because "students can't focus," or intrinsically "lack motivation".

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<sup>9</sup> Respondent from the Department of Management

<sup>10</sup> Respondent from the Department of Geography and Environment

<sup>11</sup> Respondent from the Department of Geography and Environment

- **Structural Barriers / factors student control:** Some respondents believe that multiple structural factors create impediments to attendance that extend beyond individual motivation. For instance:
  - Rising commuting costs and living expenses force students to prioritise paid employment over lectures. Similarly, students may have other academic commitments or assessments which increase the opportunity cost of attending live lectures.
  - Timetabling practices often create structural disincentives for attendance. When lectures are scheduled in isolation (i.e. on days when students have no other campus commitments) the journey becomes difficult to justify.
  - Even if students overcome these barriers and attend in-person lectures, they encounter infrastructural limitations – such as large, inflexible lecture theatres that inhibit the interactive teaching methods departments attempt to implement to boost engagement.
- **Generational Shift:** Many academics consider their current students as “digital natives”, who bring with them different attention patterns and learning preferences. Traditional 50-minute lectures struggle to compete with more on-demand, bite-sized content, and students increasingly question the “value-add” of physical attendance when they can consume the same information via lecture capture (at a speed of 1.5x).

In many cases, these hypothesised causes will likely operate in conjunction. A student facing financial pressure (a structural barrier) may work evening shifts that affect their energy levels (motivation), leading them to rely on recordings (technological solutions) - indicating that interventions targeting singular factors are unlikely to reverse attendance trends.

## Student Perspectives

Through the two student focus groups and one “Student Education Panel”, we are able to contrast these academic perceptions with students own views on lecture attendance. This provided important counterpoints to academic perceptions:

- **Assessment-Driven Attendance Patterns:** Students consistently stated that perceived assessment relevance and broader integration of content into overall learning objectives strongly influences their attendance. Lectures not explicitly linked to assessments are frequently deemed non-essential, reflecting strategic approaches to time management and academic prioritisation. This view of education is consistent with the claim that students view their studies through a cost-benefit lens (*with a particularly strong understanding of the former*), where attendance must demonstrate clear returns on time invested.
- **Lecture Quality and Pedagogic Value:** Students distinguish between lectures that merely transmit textbook content and those that provide genuine pedagogical value. Common criticisms include:
  - Lectures consisting primarily of text-heavy slides that could be read independently.
  - Sessions where instructors “deliver the textbook” rather than synthesising, contextualising, or expanding upon written materials.
  - Presentations where individual attendance appears inconsequential to learning outcomes. As one student noted: “It’s when it’s a lot of text on the slides because you might as well just read the slides or you might as well just read the textbook”.
- **Class Size and Environment:** Large class sizes emerge as significant attendance deterrents. Students report that lectures with “150 people in the same class” create environments where individual presence feels inconsequential. This anonymity effect reduces both accountability and the possibility of meaningful interaction, undermining two key functions of in-person attendance.

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- Equally, students are less likely to attend lectures which take place in unsatisfactory physical environments (e.g., lack of adequate lighting, writing surfaces, air conditioning). The Peacock Theatre, for instance, was identified as particularly 'poor' venue for supporting student learning.
- **Peer Engagement and Collective Motivation:** The quality of peer engagement influences attendance decisions. Paradoxically, students value sessions where "everyone else there really wants to be there", suggesting that collective enthusiasm creates positive learning environments that encourage attendance. Conversely, sparsely attended lectures perpetuate cycles of non-attendance.
- **Scheduling Issues:** Timetabling emerges as a crucial practical factor, with early morning sessions presenting particular challenges. Students distinguish between mandatory seminars, and optional lectures, with 9:00 AM lectures facing significantly lower attendance. One student suggested: "Maybe even just more lectures from 10:00 AM ... would drastically improve attendance".
- **Disciplinary Differences in Recording Utility:** Students articulate varied understanding of how lecture recordings serve different functions across disciplines. In quantitative subjects, the ability to "slow down and listen at your own pace makes a really big difference", with recordings enabling self-paced engagement with complex material. Perhaps in certain disciplines, they believe recordings may genuinely enhance rather than replace learning, challenging blanket assumptions about their impact.
- **Level of Study:** Undergraduate students report being deterred by commuting costs, early morning scheduling conflicts, and poor lecture delivery. They are particularly sensitive to lecturer personality and claim to avoid lectures for the reasons outlined above. In contrast, postgraduate students express that long commutes (30-45 minutes) make single-lecture days particularly inefficient and thus strategize their attendance accordingly. Work-life balance considerations and mental health priorities ("After the break in December, many students are low on energy, homesick") also emerged as factors driving their (non-)attendance.

This view on structural barriers aligns better with literature findings (Oldfield et al., 2019; Menendez Alvarez-Hevia et al., 2021) that external pressures (rather than student deficiencies) drive attendance patterns. Here, it is equally important to note the disconnect between students' expectations of the pedagogical purpose of lectures and lecturers' stated objectives. Students often express preference for more 'interactive' and 'personable' lectures, mirroring the participatory approach characteristic of seminars. However, academics conceptualise lectures through different pedagogical lenses, primarily as venues for knowledge transmission and synthesising content across the module or programme, rather than as spaces for direct student engagement.

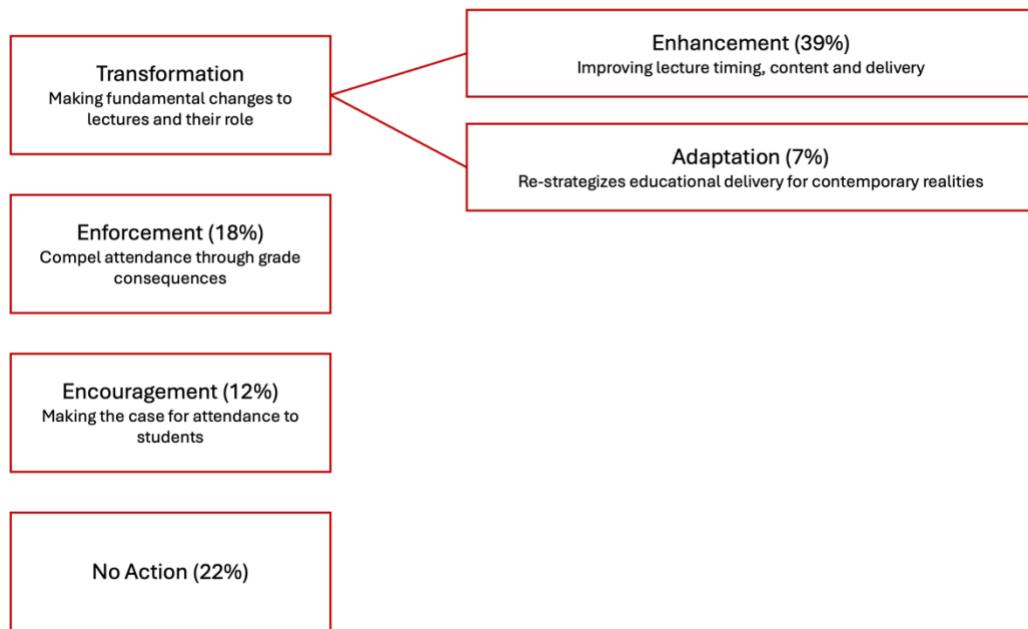
Taken together, these findings challenge deficit-based explanations of declining attendance. Rather than one-dimensional disengagement, student perspectives reveal rational and multifactorial decision-making processes, whereby students express agency to actively evaluate the relative value of attendance against alternative uses of their time - considering assessment relevance, teaching quality, peer dynamics, and practical constraints among other factors. This framing further indicates a possible disconnect between institutional approaches to attendance and student agency, as whilst universities increasingly adopt monitoring systems premised on students requiring external structure and accountability, students themselves demonstrate cost-benefit analyses that position them as autonomous actors making strategic educational choices.

### 3 Divergent Solutions: Three Paradigms<sup>12</sup>

How have respondents attempted to reverse declining attendance trends? Examining our responses reveals distinct approaches, grounded in different theoretical assumptions and yielding varying results. This section analyses these approaches, examining their underlying logic, and any available evidence regarding their effectiveness in achieving stated objectives.

However, the paradigms outlined in this section should be understood as analytical categories rather than mutually exclusive positions.

Figure 2 Solution Paradigms



A note on paradigm categorisation: The Enhancement and Adaptation Paradigms share fundamental similarities, both focusing on transforming educational delivery rather than *compelling* attendance. These 'Transformational Paradigms' are conceptually distinct from Enforcement approaches that mandate attendance through policy interventions. While some responses also mentioned 'Encouragement' strategies (such as communicating attendance benefits), these are excluded from the primary paradigm analysis owing to two reasons: (1) where these strategies were implemented, respondents consistently reported that they did not yield attendance improvement, and (2) encouragement was not perceived as an active intervention requiring resources or structural change. The three paradigms analysed below hence represent more substantive interventions involving systemic change.

#### 3.1 Enhancement Paradigm: Representing 39% of responses

This paradigm represents academics' attempts to reverse declining attendance by improving the lecture experience. Recognising that students were choosing not to attend, proponents of this approach sought to create lectures that draw students back. This way, the Enhancement Paradigm places responsibility on educators to provide experiences worth attending. Key strategies include:

<sup>12</sup> In total, 165 individuals answered this question, with each answer on average containing 1.4 codes. Minor themes not reported in the main text include no action taken (22% of responses), strategies focusing on verbal encouragement of attendance (12%) and surveys of students or seeking feedback (2%).

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- **Community building initiatives:** Deliberately fostering social connections through group activities, peer learning exercises, and collaborative projects that make lectures sites of relationship formation.
- **Interactive transformation:** Moving beyond traditional didactic delivery to incorporate live polling, small group discussions, problem-solving sessions, and real-time Q&A that require physical presence.
- **Contemporary contextualisation:** Connecting academic content to current events, real-world debates, and pressing societal challenges to demonstrate immediate relevance.
- **Value-added experiences:** Ensuring lectures offer elements that cannot be replicated or captured wholly through recordings - spontaneous discussions, networking opportunities, and dynamic responses to student interests.

The Enhancement Paradigm essentially asks: "How can we make lectures so engaging and valuable that students choose to attend despite competing pressures?"

The following departmental case studies illustrate institutions that have primarily emphasised enhancement strategies, though many concurrently incorporate elements from other paradigms<sup>13</sup>:

- **Statistics:** Statistics prioritises pedagogical transformation over restrictive measures. The dominant approach centres on "making lectures engaging/reflective of students' needs" (4 instances), complemented by various interactive elements including discussion integration (2 instances) and enhanced lecturer-student interaction (1 instance). This student-centred philosophy contrasts sharply with other departments' reliance on recording restrictions - Statistics shows only one instance of stopping recordings. This pedagogic focus was complemented by practical improvements, including strategic timetabling (scheduling seminars and lectures on the same day) and attendance monitoring. The department's strategy fundamentally assumes that making lectures inherently valuable and responsive to student needs will prove more effective than enforcing attendance through recording scarcity or mandatory policies.
- **Management:** The department prioritises pedagogical transformation, with interactive elements implemented most frequently (7 instances) alongside efforts to make lectures engaging and student-responsive (4 instances). Recognising that students question lecture value, Management addresses this directly by making content "relevant/accessible to current students' realities" (3 instances). The department also reinforces attendance through 'enforcement' - including by stopping lecture recordings, incorporating lecture-exclusive content into assessments, and delivering 'Harvard-style' lectures where participation is graded through case discussions (2 instances). Additional innovations include format experimentation with online delivery and flipped classrooms (3 instances) and controlled recording release (2 instances). Unique among surveyed departments, Management also invests in relationship-building through student surveys and deliberate bond-formation initiatives, suggesting they view attendance challenges as requiring comprehensive pedagogical and cultural transformation rather than more punitive measures alone.

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<sup>13</sup> Our analysis found the below departments presenting surprisingly homogenous responses – an intriguing finding, given that the survey was distributed to individual academics rather than departmental representatives. This may suggest either strong departmental cultures to have shaped responses, or organic convergence around similar solutions within disciplinary communities. However, most departments were shaped by multi-pronged approaches, with academics drawing from different philosophical approaches, combining enhancement initiatives with enforcement mechanisms or blending adaptive flexibility with attendance requirements.

- **Social Policy:** Social policy sits within all three paradigms. However, interactive elements dominate overwhelmingly with "integrating discussion/interactive elements" being mentioned 7 times (the highest frequency across all departments), and additional *lecturer-student* interaction mentioned 3 times. The department supports this core strategy through multiple complementary measures: systematic attendance monitoring (4 instances), communication emphasising lecture importance (3 instances), assessment-lecture integration (2 instances), and efforts to make content student-responsive (2 instances). Practical interventions include strategic timetabling to co-locate seminars and lectures (2 instances) and student feedback collection (2 instances).

### 3.2 Adaptation Paradigm: Representing 7% of responses

This paradigm accepts declining traditional attendance as reflecting legitimate changes in student circumstances and learning preferences. Rather than trying to restore previous attendance patterns, it reimagines educational delivery for contemporary realities. Key features include:

- **Flexible delivery modes:** Offering multiple ways to engage with content - live, recorded, online, or hybrid.
- **Flipped classroom approaches:** Using face-to-face time for high-value activities while moving content delivery online.
- **Student autonomy:** Respecting students as adults who can make informed choices about their learning.
- **Innovation in format:** Experimenting with session length, timing, and structure to better accommodate student needs<sup>14</sup>.

The Adaptation Paradigm asks: "How can we achieve our educational objectives while acknowledging that traditional lecture attendance may no longer suit many students?"

- **LSE100:** LSE100's move away from traditional lectures was driven by "incredibly low attendance". The current approach suggest that this change worked – and that the received wisdom that "*digital natives can't focus*" might be better framed as format mismatch rather than student deficiency. They believe that matching delivery methods to contemporary learning preferences - short, focused, rewritable content plus meaningful interaction, can restore engagement that traditional lectures have lost.
- **Mathematics:** One respondent adopted a flipped classroom approach. However, students used the videos to avoid attending lectures rather than using them to prepare - with the respondent noting "*limited success as most students just want the recordings to avoid the cost/inconvenience of travel.*" Efforts can hence be undermined by practical barriers and student motivations. The second respondent used two strategies: delayed recording release to create mild pressure to attend, whilst linking assessments to lecture content more explicitly, in order to demonstrate to students why attendance matters.

### 3.3 Enforcement Paradigm: Representing 18% of responses

This paradigm takes a more directive approach, using institutional authority to compel attendance through monitoring mechanisms and grade-based incentives. Rather than relying on intrinsic motivation, it creates extrinsic consequences for non-attendance. Common elements include:

- **Attendance requirements:** Implementing attendance monitoring, with academic penalties for non-attendance.

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<sup>14</sup> This overlaps with the Enhancement Paradigm.

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- **Participation grades:** Allocating marks specifically for physical presence or in-class contributions.
- **Recording restrictions:** Removing or limiting access to lecture recordings to eliminate attendance alternatives.
- **Exclusive content:** Ensuring critical assessment information is only available to those who attend.

The Enforcement Paradigm reflects the belief that students may not recognise (or realise) the value of attendance without external pressure and structure.

- **International Relations:** Like many departments, IR illustrates a hybrid model where academics combine enforcement mechanisms with enhancement strategies. Recording management emerges as the primary enforcement tool, with delayed release policies (4 instances) and complete recording cessation (2 instances) creating scarcity to drive attendance. Notably, the department pairs these restrictions with intensive communication campaigns, repeatedly stressing both peer interaction benefits and lecture importance for success (3 instances each).

### 3.4 (Lack of) Impact

Ultimately, evidence for the effectiveness of interventions across these approaches was limited: few respondents drew clear links between changes to teaching practices and attendance, and even in cases where examples were given, they were often caveats as self-reported observations. The few solutions that were reported as improving attendance are summarised in Table 1.

*Table 1 A preliminary understanding of the solutions associated with positive impact (ranked in order of stated impact)*

Solution	No. of mentions of positive impact
Arrange timetables well (seminar and lecture scheduled for the same day)	8
Tying assessments more specifically to lecture content	4
Offering online lectures (live)/Flipped classrooms	4
Integrating more discussion/incorporating more interactive elements	4
Forming a stronger bond with students (e.g. more personable lectures, learning names, engaging directly / more personally with them)	3

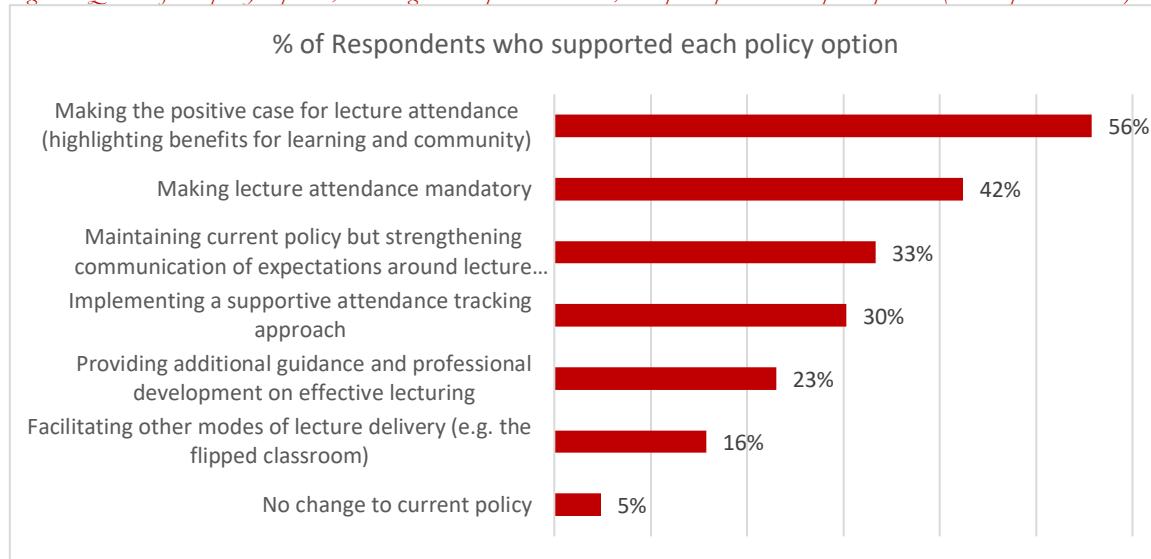
## 4 Looking Ahead: What could future policies look like?

Although many lecturers identified a problem and began implementing solutions, survey responses reveal that these efforts coexist with widespread confusion and exhaustion among academic staff. The widespread agreement that change is necessary has left staff feeling overwhelmed, uncertain about what works, and exhausted by repeated unsuccessful reforms. This disconnect between solution implementation and successful outcomes suggests that two critical factors may impede progress: insufficient evidence about 'what works', or systematic barriers that prevent successful implementation even when strategies are theoretically sound. Even amid this exhaustion and uncertainty, academics demonstrate clear preferences for constructive institutional responses.

## 4.1 Preferred Policy Options

To further explore views on possible ways forward, the survey asked respondents to select their preferred policy options from a multiple-choice list (Q3) (Figure 3). From these choices, the most preferred option was making the positive case for lecture attendance (i.e. encouraging students to attend for their own benefit), followed by making lecture attendance mandatory, and maintaining current policy but strengthening communication of expectations to students.

Figure 3: Q3 - Preferred policy responses, excluding 'other' options. N=165; multiple responses record per respondent (total responses = 361)



## 4.2. Policy Rationales

Analysing this data together with Q4 – which asked colleagues to explain *why* they preferred their selected policy options – highlights broad consistencies between approaches currently implemented and School-level policy options preferred. Surprisingly, these responses also reveal a disconnect between the popularity of policy options and the amount of justification given for them. Ultimately, the popularity of a policy option should hence not be considered as simply revealing the policy option respondents thought was most likely to lead to success. Instead, a myriad of factors appears to have influenced choices, including views on student's agency and responsibility, the expected workload for staff and students in case of implementation, strengths of the proposals relative to the proposed alternatives, and possibly also how likely a policy could be agreed upon across LSE in the first place. For example, mandatory lecture attendance was one of the most extensively discussed options, despite being overall less supported than the positive case for lecture attendance. As such, the reasons stated in support of each policy options also reveal important differences in stance and considered benefit:

**Making a positive case for lecture attendance** was mostly justified by appeal to the benefits of lecture attendance, while acknowledging that students – especially after COVID – needed additional encouragement to realise them. Advocates of this option also highlighted its relatively more flexible nature, respecting students' agency and autonomy to choose which parts of their course to engage with, while also maintaining that more enforcement focused approaches might disadvantage those that could not attend for legitimate reasons.

Respondents made the case for **mandatory lecture attendance** by a similar appeal to the value of lectures – noting, for example, that students attending lectures demonstrated better learning outcomes – alongside emphasising the negative impact of low attendance on lecturers and students alike. However, proponents of mandatory attendance commonly considered that unless made mandatory, students would not attend lectures, as they failed to recognise or be sufficiently motivated by the benefits. Additional

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considerations included the observation of positive impact of mandatory attendance in specific courses, the fact that attendance was mandatory at many other institutions, or occasional reference to students who had asked for lectures to be made mandatory.

The proposal to **maintain the current policy while strengthening communications around expectations** was mainly supported by colleagues noting that a variety of information could be provided. This policy option was also considered to continue to respect students' agency in determining their engagement, including in cases where lecture attendance was not considered an issue in the first place. Notably, some respondents also pointed out that one way to strengthen communications might be to avoid emphasising the optional character of lectures in the first place.

The few colleagues discussing the proposal for **supportive attendance tracking** pointed out that this approach could itself strengthen attendance if the information was reflected to students, for example via their LSE for You profiles. Colleagues also pointed out potential benefits for staff, where this option might allow better insights into the impact of non-attendance, better insights into the impact of related changes such as timetabling, as well as identification of students persistently not attending.

Colleagues' discussion of **additional guidance and development** was primarily concerned with the additional work that academics might encounter, while overall acknowledging the value of lecturers putting additional effort into designing more interactive courses, which they considered was usually recognised by students.

Among colleagues that discussed **facilitating other modes of lecture delivery**, reflections focused on both negative prior experiences with flipped classroom models, as well as technical limitations related to the recordability of such sessions. However, respondents also noted such model's suitability especially for smaller class groups, as well as its ability to make lectures more engaging and emphasis discussion-based learning – a particular benefit in the face of AI.

Lastly, and despite the very low expressed preferences in the survey, a range of respondents considered possible benefits of making **no changes to the current policy**. Most commonly, colleagues argued that students were adults, with competing responsibilities, that should attend only if they chose to. Closely relatedly, colleagues also expressed concerns about the impact of any form of mandatory attendance, including additional administrative burdens, as well as unintended consequences, fostering resentment rather than meaningful engagement.

### 4.3 Policy Preferences: Reflections

Considering both stated preferences and the provided rationales, we consider two overall implications for future policy options:

- (1) Mirroring the discussion between enforcement and transformation focused paradigms, the survey highlights a foundational tension between advocates of approaches that centre students' freedom to choose their engagement, and those considering that more stringent enforcement is necessary to realise the pedagogical benefits of lectures for students.
- (2) The hierarchy of preferences emerging among academic colleagues (persuasion first, enforcement second, training last) reveals their current priorities for addressing attendance. The strong support for mandatory policies, rather than pedagogical improvement, suggests that many academics view attendance problems as stemming from external factors outside their direct control (timetabling, recordings, policies that "make it easy to not be here"). Mandatory lecture attendance was particularly favoured by departments experiencing the most acute challenges, emerging as their top choice by a significant margin. Notably, these same departments report having already implemented numerous enhancement strategies - suggesting they may view mandatory attendance as necessary when other interventions appear insufficient.

## 5 A Deep Dive into Departments

Moving beyond individual responses to examine departmental patterns provides an additional analytical layer that uncovers collective approaches to the attendance challenge. By aggregating and comparing responses across Q2, Q3 and Q4 at the departmental level, we identified three distinct categories, each characterised by different levels of concern, resource investment, and proposed approaches. This departmental-level analysis demonstrates notable coherence within many departments - colleagues facing similar disciplinary contexts and student populations appear to converge on comparable problem definitions and preferred solutions, despite not necessarily coordinating their responses.

*Please note: While variation certainly exists within departments, this analysis illuminates wider patterns of convergence, as academics working towards similar pedagogical objectives reflective of their discipline tend to cluster around shared perspectives on both the severity of the problem and appropriate interventions.*

### 5.1 Departments at an Impasse

#### **Management, Geography and Environment, Social Policy, Methodology, Media and Communications, Government, and Sociology**

These departments express the greatest concern regarding attendance decline, identifying it as a fundamental challenge to their educational objectives. They are characterised by extensive intervention efforts, having typically implemented multiple enhancement strategies with varying degrees of success. Key characteristics include:

- **High resource investment:** Substantial allocation of staff time and departmental resources toward attendance improvement initiatives.
- **Strategy cycling:** Progressive implementation of increasingly intensive interventions.
- **Shift toward mandatory policies:** Growing preference of attendance requirements after enhancement strategies prove insufficient.
- **Staff exhaustion:** Evidence of fatigue and frustration in survey responses, with comments suggesting diminishing returns on effort invested.
- **Outcome concerns:** Concerns about student achievement and integration.

These departments often reported feeling trapped between pedagogical ideals and practical realities, having tried "everything" with limited success, and now advocate for enforcement.

### 5.2 Laissez-Faire Departments

#### **International Relations, Health Policy, Mathematics, Anthropology, Economics, Law, International History**

These departments demonstrate minimal active intervention regarding attendance patterns, often due to philosophical stance. Rather than viewing declining attendance as requiring systematic response, they maintain traditional approaches with limited modification. Characteristics include:

- **Minimal strategy implementation:** Few or no specific initiatives targeting attendance improvement.
- **Enforcement without enhancement:** Where policies exist, they tend toward basic requirements rather than pedagogical innovation.
- **Communication emphasis:** Focus on clarifying expectations rather than *transforming* delivery.
- **Acceptance of status quo:** Implicit or explicit acceptance that attendance patterns reflect broader

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changes beyond individual control.

- **Postgraduate only departments:** International Development and Gender Studies – who perceive the issue of declining attendance as primarily related to UG students.
- **"Students as adults" philosophy:** Reflecting both (i) the normative belief that students should be treated as autonomous decision-makers, and (ii) the practical reality that departments cannot enforce attendance under current School policies.

These departments may view attendance as ultimately a student responsibility, maintaining that quality education is available for those who 'choose' to engage.

### 5.3 Transforming Departments

#### Statistics, Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method, LSE100

These departments approach declining attendance as an opportunity for fundamental reconsideration of educational delivery. Rather than attempting to restore traditional patterns, they experiment with innovative formats that acknowledge changing student needs. Key features include:

- **Embracing flexibility:** Implementing varied timetabling options, hybrid delivery modes, and student-centred scheduling.
- **"Students as adults" philosophy:** Explicit recognition of students' agency and competing life responsibilities.
- **Pedagogical innovation:** Investment in flipped classrooms, problem-based learning, and alternative session formats.
- **Technology as an enabler:** Viewing digital tools as solutions for enhancing rather than replacing engagement.
- **Outcome focus:** Prioritising learning objectives over attendance metrics.

These departments do not necessarily work towards higher traditional attendance rates, and instead represent a fundamental reimaging of what higher education might look like in contemporary contexts.

## 6 Suggestions from Student Discussions

During all three student data collections, students articulated clear criteria for lecture attendance decisions. Beyond structural barriers (inconvenient scheduling, large class sizes, poor venues) students identified lecture delivery style as the key determinant - weighing costs of attending against expected benefits. The prevalence of this cost-benefit framing suggests that the distinctive value of live lectures may not be immediately apparent to students, indicating a potential gap in understanding about what synchronous, in-person learning uniquely offers. Students characterised valuable lectures as incorporating real-world examples, interactive elements, and crucially, lecturers' passion combined with personal research insights. In quantitative disciplines, students also noted that recordings often provide superior learning opportunities compared to fast-paced live lectures where content coverage outpaces comprehension.

This aligns with established research. Quinlan<sup>15</sup> (2019) found that perceived teacher personality (enthusiasm, friendliness, approachability, knowledgeability) was students' most important situational factor. Revell and Wainwright<sup>16</sup> (2009) similarly identified passion and enthusiasm as crucial, while

<sup>15</sup> Quinlan, K.M., Thomas, D.S.P., Hayton, A. et al. Promoting students' interest through culturally sensitive curricula in higher education. *High Educ* 88, 1331–1351 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01172-z>

<sup>16</sup> Revell, A., & Wainwright, E. (2009). What Makes Lectures 'Unmissable'? Insights into Teaching Excellence and Active Learning. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 33(2), 209–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098260802276771>

approachable teachers made students comfortable admitting confusion. Oldfield et al.'s<sup>17</sup> work further revealed how student anonymity afforded by large class sizes and exacerbated by lacking supportive interactions, contributed to disengagement and non-attendance.

However, the students also largely agreed that gentle encouragement alone was unlikely to influence their decisions. Instead, they put forth a range of tangible policy changes, including:

- Participation grades (5-10% of total) to incentivise attendance without being punitive.
- Attendance tracking via QR codes or tap-in systems - viewed positively as providing accountability and supporting pastoral care.
- Better alignment between lectures, seminars and assessments ("missing lectures to work on assessment was considered a rational response when the lectures seemed to bear no relation to future assessment").
- Hybrid lecture-seminar models that combine teaching formats in single sessions.

## 7 Integrating Literature, Student and Academic Perspectives: Points of Convergence and Divergence

Comparing and contrasting the perspectives expressed across our data sources, four key areas of focus emerge.

### 1. Lecture quality and engagement

Students consistently emphasise that engaging delivery and teaching quality drive their attendance decisions. Even where they acknowledge that 'good' lectures might not be sufficient for engagement, they maintain that such quality is at least necessary and should form a corner stone of any change. This contrasts with academics self-reported preferences (persuasion first, enforcement second, training last) and reveals a fundamental disconnect in how each group understands the problem. Students also stressed on the importance of training lecturers in communication and public speaking to enhance engagement – though only 23 percent of responses to Q3 supported professional development for effective lecturing as an institutional response (and within this, only five departments<sup>18</sup>). This divergence may reflect different understandings of what drives attendance: whilst academics focus on structural and policy solutions, students prioritise the immediate classroom experience. Indeed, if students consider lectures dispensable due to unclear pedagogic value, this points to the importance of better aligning educational delivery and design to communicate and deliver distinctive learning benefits.

### 2. The Implementation Paradox

Some departments report implementing numerous strategies that align with student requests – from interactive elements and relationship building to contemporary relevance. Yet, they see minimal attendance improvement. This disconnect manifests in growing faculty exhaustion, particularly evident in survey progression where tone shifts from pedagogical optimism in Q2 ("making lectures more engaging") to enforcement requests in Q3 and Q6 ("making attendance mandatory").

More commonly however, while students seek personable relationships, interactive engagement, and high-quality delivery, survey responses show academics primarily conceptualise lectures as vehicles for foundational knowledge transmission. Implicit in this is the view that current lecture practices are 'good

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<sup>17</sup> Oldfield, J and Rodwell, J and Curry, L and Marks, G (2017) A face in a sea of faces: exploring university students' reasons for non-attendance to teaching sessions. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 43 (4). pp. 443-452. ISSN 0309-877X

<sup>18</sup> Economics, European Institute, International Relations, Statistics, Media and Communications.

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enough', despite student calls for improved delivery. These differing perspectives on what constitutes effective teaching may contribute to the limited impact of some enhancement strategies, as academics and students appear to prioritise different aspects of lecture delivery and engagement.

### 3. Fundamental Divergences in Problem Conceptualisation

The deepest divergences emerge in how each group understands the attendance problem itself. Students frame non-attendance as rational decision-making based on value assessments. They articulate cost-benefit analyses, weighing the learning gained from attendance against paid employment, assessment preparation, or self-paced study. When noting that the decision for them is either to go to work or turn up to class, students highlight tangible economic trade-offs.

Faculty responses, however, often reveal deficit thinking – students "are barely engaged" or "cannot keep their attention on for more than a few minutes". This framing positions students as deficient rather than strategic, missing the legitimate costs students face in the absence of clearly articulated benefits. Faculty viewing *attendance* as inherently valuable may not fully appreciate these trade-offs.

### 4. The Relevance Gap

Perhaps most notably, students and academics appear to prioritise different solutions: while students explicitly seek clear connections between lectures and assessments, faculty responses predominantly emphasise attendance mechanisms (recordings, mandatory policies) rather than value propositions. Although some responses mention making content "relevant/accessible to current students' realities" or linking content directly to assessments, these strategies appear less frequently. This divergence in approach (with substantial departmental effort directed at delivery enhancement whilst questions of fundamental value receive less attention) may help explain why attendance challenges persist despite intervention efforts.

Fundamentally, these convergences and divergences suggest that improving attendance requires more than implementing student-preferred teaching method, though meeting key requirements concerning quality and relevance of lectures should present a vital first step. The core challenge lies in developing shared understanding between staff and students about what makes lectures educationally valuable and irreplaceable, rather than merely preferable. This includes helping faculty recognise students as rational actors making legitimate choices within competing demands, while articulating to students what synchronous, in-person learning uniquely provides that cannot be replicated through recordings or independent study. Without addressing these underlying divergences in how the problem is understood, even well-executed enhancement strategies may fail to have tangible impact.

## 8 Recommendations

Centrally, our analysis indicates that no single institutional policy (particularly enforcing attendance) can effectively address the diverse attendance challenges reported across departments. Solutions must be tailored to departmental contexts, disciplinary requirements, and pedagogical philosophies.

The findings also point towards a need to reflect on our institutional objectives. Rather than focusing solely on improving *attendance*, it may be important to articulate why physical presence matters, for whom, and whether it genuinely creates value for everyone, across different departments. A mandatory attendance policy would likely achieve this goal, yet it will risk conflating presence with engagement.

In disciplines prioritising knowledge transmission (such as Mathematics, Statistics etc.), increasing attendance through mandatory attendance policies or graded participation may add little pedagogical value since information can be delivered through recordings, at students' individual paces – one student expresses, "in quantitative disciplines, the fact that you can really slow down and listen (to recordings) at

your own pace makes a really big difference (to learning)"<sup>19</sup>.

Conversely, departments who view lectures as platforms for community building and interactive learning may benefit from such enforcement strategies, as increasing attendance would help them realise their educational objectives. A fundamental question must thus be what the values of lectures are – especially in the context of alternative formats such as lecture recordings, seminars/tutorials, and hybrid 'workshop' sessions.

Likewise, even after implementing various enhancement strategies to drive lecture quality in line with their pedagogical goals, those still experiencing low attendance may benefit from graded participation, technological restriction in classrooms, limited/delayed lecture recordings, and so on. These measures may help create the collective value these departments seek, as interactive and community-based learning requires sufficient student presence to function effectively, and collaborative discussion and peer learning cannot occur without meaningful engagement.

Nonetheless, enforcing attendance without addressing lecture effectiveness risks masking deeper pedagogical issues. More fundamentally, mandatory attendance policies raise questions about how we conceptualise student agency in higher education: are students autonomous adults whom we expect to make their own educational decisions, or do institutions have a paternalistic responsibility to ensure attendance for students' own benefit? This tension between developing independent learners and enforcing attendance requirements appears central to the mandatory attendance debate. Rather than compelling attendance to lectures where students are not learning effectively, institutional efforts might better focus on first supporting departments to understand barriers to attendance and engagement, thus addressing root causes rather than symptoms.

Additional possible recommendations outlined below are derived from triangulated analysis of academic survey data and SEP transcripts.

## 8.1 Institutional Recommendations

- **Institutional coherence:** Establishing clearer recording policies and attendance expectations (or grading participation) while allowing flexibility for those who need it most.
- **Spatial and temporal improvements:** Despite acknowledged complexities around space pressures and timetabling constraints, there remain opportunities to reallocate learning spaces and reconfigure timetabling systems to better support efficient, interactive teaching—particularly for departments that rely on peer-peer/staff-student collaboration.
- **Support innovation:** Creating mechanisms for continuous feedback, sharing successful practices and supporting pedagogical experimentation (e.g. flipped classrooms, ECTs, AI fellowships), reducing uncertainty and addressing the workload concerns many academics raised – though implementing such comprehensive support would require substantial resource allocation and institutional commitment.
- **By department, limiting the use of recorded lectures and delaying materials:** This emerged as the most popular form of support academics require (Q5), with over 55 calls for action in the survey. However, implementation would require clear communication to students who navigate different recording policies across their modules and may not understand departmental variations without explicit explanation. Additionally, any restrictions should carefully consider inclusivity implications for students with disabilities, caring responsibilities, or other legitimate needs for recorded content.

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<sup>19</sup> Participant in Student Education Panel, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

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### 8.2 Departmental Recommendations

- **Matching solutions to disciplinary needs:** Departments could consider developing discipline-specific approaches that reflect their unique pedagogical requirements and student populations. Quantitative disciplines, where students report that recordings enable superior comprehension through self-paced learning, may require fundamentally different interventions than discussion-based humanities courses where real-time dialogue is irreplaceable.
- **Departments could conduct systematic assessments of their specific attendance challenges before implementing solutions:** This includes examining whether non-attendance genuinely impacts learning outcomes in their discipline, and identifying which lecture functions (knowledge transfer, community building, skills development) are most critical for their students.

Current departmental responses frequently target attendance symptoms through enforcement mechanisms or surface-level enhancements without addressing underlying structural barriers. The survey reveals widespread support for recording restrictions, mandatory policies, and interactive elements, yet these interventions may fail if they do not acknowledge the legitimate constraints shaping student choices. Thus, departments could consider understanding and addressing root causes:

- **Opportunity Costs:** Departments may want to engage with students to better understand what, if any, structural barriers are affecting low participation, including opportunity costs and scheduling conflicts. Where economic realities require students to balance work with study, this might involve exploring how to maximise the value of limited attendance - such as concentrating essential content into fewer, high-impact sessions or developing asynchronous alternatives for content that genuinely may not require synchronous delivery.
- **Scheduling Conflicts:** Strategic timetabling that clusters related classes, avoids isolated lectures, and considers student commuting patterns can remove structural barriers to attendance. Departments may collaborate with timetabling teams to create schedules that facilitate rather than hinder attendance – though this re-organisation may require significant investment in time and resources.
- **Value/Benefit Proposition:** Our research suggests that students commonly do not perceive clear value in lecture attendance. Articulating and communicating this value - while ensuring that lecture delivery is of sufficient quality to fulfil these commitments - could improve attendance, or at minimum, establish the pedagogical foundation necessary for any mandatory policies. This requires departments to explicitly demonstrate how attendance enhances learning beyond available alternatives, communicating what specific, tangible benefits physical presence provides, and most crucially, ensuring these benefits are genuinely delivered.
- **Assessment Alignment:** Where attendance truly matters for learning outcomes, this may be reflected in assessment design; not exclusively through more punitive measures such as participation grades, but through assessments that authentically require the knowledge, skills, or perspectives gained through attendance. Essentially, lectures may be designed to be 'unmissable', in the sense that they provide an opportunity for students to succeed in their examinations.

### 8.3 Individual-Level Recommendations

#### For Academic Staff

As discussed above, survey responses indicate potential misalignment between academic and student perspectives regarding lecture delivery. Academic respondents generally report confidence in their teaching approaches, while student respondents express preferences for increased interactivity, clearer

links to assessment, and more interpersonal engagement during lectures. To address this, academic staff may consider accessing support provided by the Eden Centre, which includes resources pertaining to:

- Interactive teaching techniques appropriate to their discipline and class size.
- Effective and passionate communication drawing on lecturers' own research interests and insights – which students identify as attendance drivers.
- Strategies for building rapport in large classes while maintaining academic rigour.
- Methods for explicitly connecting theoretical content to assessment requirements.

The survey equally brings to light significant frustration when enhancement efforts yield minimal attendance improvement. As such, it may be important to acknowledge that:

- Different learning objectives may require different levels of physical attendance, with some outcomes achievable through varied modes of engagement.
- Student non-attendance often reflects rational decision-making rather than disengagement.
- Traditional lecture formats may genuinely offer less value in some disciplines than alternative modes.
- Success metrics that focus on learning outcomes rather than attendance figures.

This recalibration does not mean lowering standards, but rather focusing energy on interventions that demonstrably improve *learning* rather than merely filling seats.

## For Students

Students should be encouraged to develop metacognitive awareness about their attendance decisions to ensure accurate assessment of educational trade-offs. This involves critically examining whether recordings genuinely provide equivalent learning experiences or merely create an "illusion of learning" - particularly given evidence that recorded lectures are often unwatched or consumed superficially at accelerated speeds. Students must also consider the long-term opportunity costs of missing collaborative learning experiences that cannot be replicated asynchronously, including peer networks, spontaneous insights, and intellectual community participation. Furthermore, attendance decisions affect not only individual learning but the collective classroom dynamic, as multiple respondents noted that sparse attendance diminishes the experience for those present. By developing this self-awareness, students can make more intentional choices about when physical presence adds irreplaceable value versus when asynchronous engagement suffices, aligning attendance patterns with their genuine learning objectives rather than short-term convenience.

## 8.4 Next Steps: Further Analysis & Research

In addition to any changes to policy discussed above, we consider that experimentation with robust evaluation and data collection should be a priority. There are several key areas for such work:

- Currently, LSE collects no data on lecture attendance. To better understand the scale of the issue – and the effectiveness of institutional responses – ways of systematically recording lecture attendance should be considered. For example, Economics has previously used a Moodle plug in for this. Some research also suggests that recording attendance itself may enhance turn-out.
- Any basic data collection could enable further analysis, such as exploring basic patterns in attendance, or associations between lecture attendance and performance/attainment. Similarly, a key hypothesis emerging from this survey is that the decline in lecture attendance is more pronounced for UG students than for PG students. Courses where lectures are attended by both UG and PG students (e.g. PH237/PH437) present a unique opportunity to test this hypothesis.

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- Additionally, more systematic experimentation – for example, trialling lecture attendance policies in a subset of courses and comparing their impact to unchanged modules – could provide valuable opportunities for learning about ‘what works’.

## Appendix 1: Summary of survey & responses

Question	Key Findings	Key Themes
Q1: What do you see as the role of lectures in your specific discipline / on your course(s)?	<p>Foundational knowledge delivery dominates across most departments, but secondary functions vary dramatically by discipline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quantitative fields (Mathematics, Statistics) focus almost exclusively on cognitive scaffolding with minimal social elements</li> <li>Social sciences want to balance knowledge transfer with community building and peer connectivity</li> <li>Applied fields (Management, Media &amp; Communications) prioritise contemporary contextualisation and real-world relevance.</li> </ul>	<p>Lectures serve the following purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge Transfer and Contextualisation</li> <li>Critical thinking and research skills development</li> <li>Peer relationship development</li> <li>Direct Q&amp;A opportunities</li> <li>Lectures viewed as essential/non-negotiable element of the discipline</li> <li>Reading Support and Integration</li> <li>Emphasise connections across module topics and materials</li> </ul>
Q2: What, if any, strategies have you implemented to increase attendance? What has been their impact?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhancement strategies dominate</li> <li>Recording management varies widely: Responses range from complete elimination to strategic delays, to no restrictions</li> <li>Postgraduate departments show fewer concerns - see International Development and Gender Studies</li> <li>Health Policy, International History, Economics, Law, and Anthropology show limited engagement despite recognising problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enforcement Strategies</li> <li>Enhancement Strategies</li> <li>Adaptation Strategies</li> </ul>
Q3: Which of the following potential institutional responses would you support? You can select more than one. Please explain your preferences in the next question.	<p>Making the positive case for lecture attendance (highlighting benefits for learning and community) and making lecture attendance mandatory emerged as the two most popular institutional responses academics would support (56% and 42% respectively).</p>	<p>Other options (in order of favourability):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining current policy but strengthening communication of expectations around lecture attendance</li> <li>Implementing a supportive attendance tracking approach</li> <li>Providing additional guidance and professional development on effective lecturing</li> <li>Facilitating other modes of lecture delivery (e.g. the flipped classroom)</li> <li>No change to current policy</li> </ul>
Q4: Why do you favour this / these institutional responses?	<p>Academics chose the responses above because they believe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attending lectures should foster collaborative and interactive learning as an integral part of learning experience</li> <li>Students being engaged in person is fundamental for learning and those that attend show different learning outcomes</li> <li>Students are adults with competing responsibilities so they should attend only if they want to.</li> </ul>	
Q5: What resources or support would help you create more engaging lecture experiences?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some departments seek enforcement – showing the highest demand for mandatory attendance policies and institutional backing after exhaustive pedagogical efforts</li> <li>Infrastructure constraints widespread: Interactive classroom spaces requested across multiple departments indicating physical environments affect attendance (in line with SEP findings)</li> <li>Many seek recording restrictions</li> </ul> <p>Despite student feedback requesting better teaching, only Statistics and Government show interest in professional development</p>	

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### Appendix 2: Q4 – reasons for the support of provided policy option, by preferred option and frequency

Code	Theme/Description	Count
<b>1</b>	<b>Making the positive case for lecture attendance (highlighting benefits for learning and community)</b>	<b>44</b>
1.1	Attending lectures should foster collaborative and interactive learning as an integral part of learning experience	23
1.2	The need to provide encouragement and incentives for students, especially after COVID	8
1.3	Should respect student's agency and autonomy and help them make an informed choice	7
1.4	Benefits beyond the academic from attending lectures such as opportunity to socialise with peers	4
1.5	Lectures should be made accessible to those who cannot attend	2
<b>2</b>	<b>Making lecture attendance mandatory</b>	<b>74</b>
2.1	Students being engaged in person is fundamental for learning and those that attend show different learning outcomes.	16
2.2	The only effective way to ensure students learn from lectures, especially in the age of AI.	13
2.3	Have tried to apply mandatory attendance in specific courses or open to trials with (partly) mandatory attendance.	11
2.4	Students fail to understand what is good for them and will not attend lectures if not mandatory, probably with consequences of non-attendance.	9
2.5	Recordings give little incentive to attend lectures in-person and should be given to certain students (i.e. adjustment plans or reasonable absence) or at certain period of time.	8
2.6	Lack of attendance leads to disincentives for lecturers and the students that attend.	6
2.7	Current LSE model undermines the value of lectures (with seminar being mandatory and not lectures).	4
2.8	Mandatory attendance is the norm in many other universities and should be the norm at LSE.	3
2.9	Feedbacks from students that they would welcome lectures being mandatory.	2
2.1	Mandatory attendance should be accompanied with travel bursaries/financial support.	2
<b>3</b>	<b>Facilitating other modes of lecture delivery (e.g. the flipped classroom)</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1	The combined lecture format/flipped classroom is better for courses and for smaller groups, but needs better recording process.	7
3.2	Flipped classroom does not work (e.g. without students watching videos, extra workload for lecturers, ineffective long-term).	4
3.3	Better use of lecturers' time and skills without recordings	2
3.4	Make lectures more engaging for students in face of AI and prepare students for discussion in seminars	2
3.5	Workshop model with a mix of teacher input and student participation	1
<b>4</b>	<b>Implementing a supportive attendance tracking approach</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1	Apply automatic attendance tracking and adapt registers from seminars, probably not mandatory	9
4.2	Attendance should be reflected back to LSE for You profiles	2
4.3	To understand the impact of not attending lectures such as on learning outcomes	2
4.4	Identify students who consistently do not attend	1
4.5	Improvement on setting up timetable to allow attendance	1
4.6	Trial tracking the impact of removing recordings on attendance	1
<b>5</b>	<b>Maintaining current policy but strengthening communication of expectations around lecture attendance</b>	<b>12</b>

5.1	Further communication around the importance of lectures/expectations for attendance	7
5.2	Not notice any problems with attendance	2
5.3	Avoid explicitly pointing out that lectures are not mandatory	2
5.4	Help increase the attendance without imposing stringent requirements	1
<b>6</b>	<b>Providing additional guidance and professional development on effective lecturing</b>	<b>7</b>
6.1	Greater efforts by lecturers for designing interactive courses and recognition by students	6
6.2	Support to make up for the higher workload for academics	1
<b>7</b>	<b>No change to current policy</b>	<b>33</b>
7.1	Students are adults with competing responsibilities so they should attend only if they want to.	15
7.2	Making lectures mandatory would be counterproductive and would create admin burdens.	10
7.3	Mandatory attendance may create resentment rather than engagement from students.	6
7.4	Current system seems to allow many possibilities.	1
7.5	Attendance problems not relevant to the courses	1



**Eden Centre for Education**

**Enhancement**

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