

Attendance and Engagement Expectations: Guidance for Students (FMHS)

Introduction

This document is a summary guide to the key principles within the Attendance and Leave policy and the associated procedures documents. These documents can be accessed here: <https://medvle.buckingham.ac.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=14911>

It is strongly recommended that students familiarise themselves with the full documents, particularly if they have attendance concerns or attendance difficulties.

Attendance and Engagement

Attendance refers to being present in the relevant location for a teaching activity. All timetabled activities will be compulsory and attendance and engagement will be expected face to face on campus (or on the relevant placement site) unless notified otherwise. Students are expected to attend punctually and stay for the duration of the session.

Engagement refers to how students participate in the learning process both inside and outside timetabled sessions. In addition to attendance, engagement is essential to meeting learning outcomes and developing the professional behaviours expected within healthcare courses.

Engagement requirements outside of scheduled sessions will be communicated in writing through standard communication channels such as email, Teams, Moodle and within workbooks and activity instruction documentation. Any individual attendance requirements in addition to the main timetable will also be communicated in writing, usually by email.

Lateness

Students are expected to arrive on time for all scheduled activities and students are responsible for planning their living and travel arrangements in order that they are able to arrive on time.

Lateness is defined as arriving after the scheduled start time of a session. If you arrive late, you may need to wait before you are permitted to start an activity (e.g. if you miss a safety briefing) and you may not be able to join the activity at all (e.g. if you miss transport to a different location). If you arrive late, you may be marked as absent. You will still be expected to attend unless asked not to by the relevant member of staff.

Attendance registers

Student attendance is normally recorded for all scheduled sessions, including lectures, workshops, group work, placements, and assessments. This helps the University ensure

that students are engaging with the learning opportunities needed to achieve their programme's learning outcomes and, where relevant, professional requirements.

Attendance data may be collected using various manual or electronic means (e.g. paper register, scanning of ID cards or release of a QR code). Students in attendance are responsible for engaging with the attendance recording process at the time it is requested. It is unlikely to be possible to add a name to the register after a session has ended.

Absence and authorisation

Your programme aims to prepare you for future professional practice, and as such you are expected to approach your studies as professional training. There is no holiday entitlement during term time, so personal commitments should be arranged outside of timetabled sessions wherever possible (for example, in the evenings, at weekends, or outside teaching blocks).

However, the Faculty appreciates that there may be some occasions when absence may be necessary due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g. illness) or due to planned essential external activities (e.g. medical appointments). In such situations, you may request authorisation of absence using the absence request form:

<https://emer.buckingham.ac.uk/preform>



If you do not follow the absence request or notification procedure, or if the reason for absence does not meet the published approval criteria (see below), the absence will normally be recorded as unauthorised. Unauthorised absences may lead to attendance interventions and, for programmes with professional standards, may also be considered a professionalism concern.

Planned absence

If you know in advance that you will need to be absent, you should complete the request form above at least 14 days before the absence date. You will need to include evidence of the reason for requesting absence and you are advised to wait for the approval notification before making any plans. The authorisation criteria and examples of suitable evidence for frequent requests can be found in the appendix. If approved, you must notify others who will be affected by your absence straight away. This is particularly important if you are studying in a clinical environment.

Unforeseen absence

Absences that arise unexpectedly should be reported to the medical school AND your placement provider if you are in phase 2, at the earliest possible opportunity, normally before the relevant scheduled activity begins. Requests will be reviewed as soon as possible and authorised if the relevant criteria are met (see appendix).

For the first 5 days of illness absence, we normally operate a self-certification process (i.e. there is no need to see a doctor unless you need to do so for medical reasons). If you need to be absent at short notice for other reasons or if you are ill for more than 5 days, you will need to include evidence with your request (e.g. medical evidence, police documentation).

Monitoring and catch up

After any period of absence, whether authorised or not, students are expected to catch up on missed learning as soon as possible, with support if needed. Completing required catch-up activities is essential to minimise the impact of absence on academic and professional progress. As a minimum, absent students should engage with the relevant lecture slides, workbook and other session resources on Moodle or other advertised location and keep records of their catch up activities. Failure to engage with catch-up for absence may be treated as equivalent to further non-engagement from the programme.

Attendance records will be monitored weekly during term time and, based on the information available at the review point, each student will be allocated one of the categories described in the Attendance and Engagement policy. If you are allocated to a category other than the satisfactory category, you will be notified of your status and will be supported through the attendance concerns framework (see below) to identify barriers to attendance and to make improvements. If you are not able to improve your attendance in the short term, you should consider suspending your studies until the barriers to attendance can be resolved.

Attendance concerns

An escalation framework has been designed for attendance profiles of concern. This includes three levels of attendance concern, with each level being considered more serious than the previous. The process is outlined in the diagram below.

broader support needs are identified that may have contributed to a student's absence, students will be signposted to relevant support services within the University and beyond. Students are also encouraged to look after their physical health and mental wellbeing and to proactively seek additional help and support whenever it may be required.

The key routes to access support are as follows:

- Your personal tutor:
 - Contact through your usual routes
- The Faculty Student Support team:
 - FMHS-studentsupport@buckingham.ac.uk
 - Book a meeting here:
<https://outlook.office365.com/book/MedicalStudentSupportServices@buckingham.ac.uk/?ismsaljsauthenabled=true>
- The University's central wellbeing team:
 - wellbeinghub@buckingham.ac.uk
 - 01280 820200,
 - [Wellbeinghub](#)

Appendix: Guidance on exceptional absence approval criteria

Examples of common requests for exceptional absence, suggestions for appropriate evidence and guidance criteria for approval are included within the following subsections.

Please note the following:

- All absence requests must be supported by appropriate evidence, and this should demonstrate why the student needs to be somewhere else or why they cannot attend where they are scheduled to be.
- Requests will be considered on an individual basis using the evidence provided and will be rejected where there is no evidence or where they don't meet the requirements as indicated below.
- Students should remember that exceptional absences are intended to be exceptional. Repeated requests for similar reasons will therefore not be considered favourably, particularly if students have not taken appropriate action to resolve previous issues or prevent a situation from reoccurring.
- Some categories may only be approved where the student has a satisfactory engagement record and where it is considered feasible for the student to catch up missed learning in their own time.
- Absences for unforeseen events will not be approved if it is considered that they should have been planned for.
- All absences, even those that are approved, will count towards attendance monitoring processes.

1.1.1 *Medical Appointments*

Wherever possible, medical appointments should always be made outside of scheduled teaching time. If appointments need to take place within teaching time, the absence request should be submitted as soon as the appointment date is known and the appointment letter should be supplied as evidence. Students are welcome to redact medical details from appointment letters if they wish, the Faculty only needs to see the name of the organisation and patient and the date, time, location and broad purpose of the appointment.

1.1.2 *Religious festivals*

Many religions and beliefs have special festivals or spiritual observance days and given the complexity and condensed nature of the curriculum it is not possible to design a timetable which allows for all religious observance. Therefore, students may request leave for religious purposes and decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis following the general principles outlined below:

1. Approved absence for religious purposes should be for a limited period; normally one or two days in any given year.
2. Requests for leave must be made at least 14 days prior to the date of the event. Where the exact date of a religious festival is only known shortly beforehand, the first potential date should be requested 14 days in advance, and this can be updated up until the actual festival date if necessary. Requests submitted less than fourteen days prior

to an event without prior consultation will not be approved.

3. Requests for absence from class for prayers or other religious activities on a regular basis will not be approved under this process. Students should plan their prayer times outside of facilitated sessions wherever possible (e.g. during self-directed study time or during breaks between sessions). If this is not possible, students should make use of natural breaks within sessions, in consultation with the person leading each session if necessary. Prayer breaks are expected to take place local to the relevant teaching session and to be of short duration (approximately 10 minutes).

4. Students are responsible for ensuring that any programme activities missed due to religious observance are caught up as much as possible in their own time. Missing course work or teaching activities due to religious observance will not be accepted as mitigating circumstances for failure in exams.

5. Every effort will be made by the Faculty to avoid a student being required to take part in assessment on a day of religious observance. However, the Faculty reserves the right to hold examinations and other assessment activities on such days if no alternative time is possible. Exceptional absence requests cannot be approved for summative assessment activities.

1.1.3 Parental leave

The Faculty understands that some students, or their partners, will have a pregnancy or adoption during the programme and will need a period of leave. Individual days off for scans and midwife appointments etc. will normally be approved using the same principles as for medical appointments. For longer term leave requirements, the Faculty will facilitate the provision of maternity/paternity/adoption leave on broadly the same terms as if the student were in employment within the NHS. All students must however meet the required standards for their course in order to progress within the programme and to graduate. This means that any substantial period of absence is likely to result in a delay to progression and to the date of graduation. Please see the 'Parental Leave policy' for more details.

1.1.4 Visa/Passport renewals

Some international students may need to renew visas or passports during their time on the course. Requests for leave must be submitted as soon as an appointment has been made and proof of the renewal requirement and appointment should be included with the request. Approved absence will normally be limited to the day of the appointment only. Students should make themselves aware of when their documents may need renewal and the routes to achieving this so that appointments can be made outside of teaching time wherever possible. If overseas travel is required for this purpose, students are expected to arrange this during holiday periods.

1.1.5 Jury Service/other civic duty

Students who are summoned to Jury service during term time should make use of the facility to request an alternative date to carry out this service. Alternative service start dates within the next year can be proposed to the courts and these dates should be selected to align with course holiday periods. International students called for similar civic duty or military service should follow the principles above to request deferral until either the course holiday periods or after graduation. If it is not possible to defer these activities

and if absence is required during term time for a duration of more than 4 weeks, students may be required to suspend their studies.

1.1.6 Travel/weather disruption

Absences will **not** normally be approved for these reasons. Students are expected to take note of weather conditions and to plan their living and travel arrangements such that they can arrive on time (e.g. by taking an earlier train/bus). In exceptional extreme travel/weather situations (e.g. Government “do not travel” instructions), requests will be considered based on the situation or formal guidance applicable to the area local to the student’s base campus (phase 1) or base hospital (phase 2). Students who choose to commute long distances daily should therefore be proactive in considering how they will meet their attendance requirements if their usual travel routes are disrupted. Similarly, students who travel away from their term time addresses during weekends or holiday periods should plan their return travel to allow for potential “routine” delays that might reasonably be anticipated.

1.1.7 Family or personal events

The Faculty does **not** offer a personal holiday allowance during term time and therefore requests for absence to attend family events or other personal activities will not normally be approved. However, in exceptional circumstances, such as the wedding of an immediate family member, absence may be authorised at the discretion of the student support lead or student support manager. Any such authorisation will normally be for one day only and will normally only be approved where the student has a satisfactory engagement record and where it is considered feasible for the student to catch up missed learning in their own time.

1.1.8 Educational and professional development activities

Students may request leave from the programme if they wish to attend medical conferences or other educational activities. Leave will be considered provided the student is contributing to the event (e.g. by giving an oral presentation or a poster presentation) or achieving some valuable career training or work experience. Typically, the student will also be presenting work they have carried out on the programme and/or be representing and enhancing the reputation of the University in some way.

Requests for this category of leave should be preceded by a discussion with the Student Support Lead and evidence should be provided by the conference organiser or training provider. Such requests will normally only be approved where the student has a satisfactory attendance/engagement record and where it is considered feasible for the student to catch up missed learning in their own time. Approval will normally be allowed on only one occasion during each academic year for a maximum of one week (5 working days) and this must not be during a summative assessment period. Alternatively, it may be appropriate to approve up to 5 individual days in an academic year for a related purpose.

1.1.9 Committee/team activities

Some students may be members of committees and if these are part of the Faculty structure (e.g. being a student rep), then absence from teaching for up to one day per term will normally be approved. It is, however, important to complete the relevant absence form

and to inform the relevant Block or Unit Lead of the approved absence.

If students need to be absent to attend committees or team activities external to the Faculty, evidence of the student's role in the committee/team and the meeting/event invitation should be provided. Any committee/team membership that requires absence from the programme on more than 2-3 days per year across all committees/teams should be discussed with the student support lead before committing to the role.

1.1.10 Paid work/volunteering

It is **not** possible for students to approve absence from course activities to carry out paid work or volunteering activities. Any paid work or volunteering activities should take place in the student's own time (evenings, weekends and holiday periods) and if taking place during term time, this should be for a maximum of 10 hours per week.

1.1.11 Other Exceptional Absence requests

The Faculty recognises that there may be other reasons why students may need to request a planned absence (e.g. to attend court as a witness) or why exceptional absences may be required at short notice on occasion (e.g. unexpected carer/dependant responsibilities or a car accident). For planned events, requests should be made at least 14 days in advance. For unforeseen events, requests should be made before the relevant teaching sessions begins on the day that the need becomes known and should normally be requesting absence for one day only.