



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BUCKINGHAM

MEDICAL SCHOOL

**MB ChB**

# **Attendance and Leave Policy**

## 1 Introduction

This document defines the policies and procedures for attendance and leave processes at the University of Buckingham Medical School. In this document, like other documents from the Medical School the terminology of the General Medical Council '*Standards for Medical Education*' applies. The use of the word '**must**' means that an activity is obligatory and will be monitored. The use of the word '**should**' means that the activity will normally comply with the guidance but there is discretion as to how that is achieved. The use of the word '**may**' indicates that an activity can take place if appropriate.

The Medical Course is a professional training and students **must** demonstrate professional attitudes and behaviour consistent with the high standards that are expected of a doctor. This means standards of attendance and engagement appropriate for a practising professional. Satisfactory attendance **must** therefore be **100%** of all scheduled learning events, due to the nature of the curriculum design, educational model and the required learning outcomes of all students. For medical students at the University of Buckingham there is no rule allowing a proportion of time off before a student is deemed unsatisfactory.

All students have scheduled periods of leave during the course commensurate with those of practising doctors, so attendance at all other times is mandatory.

The Medical School stipulates that all students **must** meet the standards and learning outcomes set by the MB ChB General Regulations, in accordance with the '*Outcomes for Graduates*' defined by the General Medical Council, in order to graduate. The nature of the MB ChB programme, the design of the curriculum, group work and self-directed learning structure and course timetabling do not allow for repeated missed sessions. The University also has some general expectations about attendance of all students which are defined in the University General Regulations for First Degrees and all of these Regulations are stipulated in the Student Agreement that **must** be signed by every student in each academic year.

## 2 Attendance and absence procedures

### 2.1 Attendance

#### 2.1.1 Registering attendance

All students **must** register their attendance at all scheduled learning events using the systems provided by the Medical School. The Medical School will monitor attendance, and will reconcile recorded absences with self-certification of illness or approved absences (see below). All unauthorised absences will be noted and action taken (see below). Patterns of self-certification of absence **must** be monitored in line with normal employment practice, and appropriate action taken.

Students will be provided with records of attendance at regular intervals during in the course, and those records must be taken into account in any consideration of mitigating circumstances of appeals against course termination.

#### 2.1.2 Phase 1

Phase 1 of the MB ChB is delivered mainly on campus and in addition, all students will have a small amount of teaching in the hospital setting as well as in the community GP practice. Students **must** attend all the teaching that is scheduled; however, the Medical School recognises that occasional absence because of illness or exceptional personal circumstances is unavoidable. All students **must**

offer an explanation for any absences (and complete a self-certification form or exceptional absence form) from taught sessions, in a similar manner to that required of a practising doctor.

Failure to do **must** mean that the absence is registered as unauthorised, and **must** be considered to be evidence of unprofessional conduct. The student's behaviour **must** be referred to the Concerns process. It will be a matter of significant concern if the unauthorised absence occurs on a day when there is direct patient contact.

In years 1 and 2, students will have vacation periods at Christmas, Easter and summer each year.

The Medical School expects all students to manage any other absence in Phase 1 correctly:

- For unexpected absences (e.g. short-term illness) students **must** notify the Student Support team via the online form on Moodle (and then students **must** notify the relevant Unit Leads).
- For absences that a student is aware of in advance (e.g. long-standing out-patients' appointment) the student **must** complete a request for exceptional absence form, from Moodle, which should be completed and submitted at least one week before the expected date of absence, with evidence, or it may not be considered.

### 2.1.3 Phase 2

The following additional principles apply to leave during the wholly clinical parts of the course:

1. Phase 2 is a full-time course and **must** be considered the same as full time employment.
2. Attendance throughout normal working hours and any programmed out-of-hours experience is **compulsory**.
3. If a student is ill and unable to attend, they **must** complete a self-certification for illness form and inform the placement provider administrator. The rules about self-certification and medical certificates are as if students were employed by the hospital and will refer to Occupational Health guidance on sickness, leave and return to work. Students may be requested to attend an Occupational Health assessment prior to return to studies at the request of the Student Support Lead.
4. If a student requests leave this **must** be through completion of the exceptional absence form available from Moodle and **must** seek guidance from their Educational Supervisor regarding missed clinical teaching.

Much of the learning in Phase 2 is dependent on students being within the clinical environment and students **must** make use of that particular opportunity. There are a large number of additional teaching sessions, which are arranged by consultants and other staff, and these are valuable and important, and students **must** attend these sessions. They form the basis of the learning and preparation of students to become competent doctors.

### 2.1.4 Attendance at teaching sessions in Phase 2 blocks

Teaching session within the Blocks:

1. Attendance at all didactic teaching sessions, is compulsory.
2. Sign-up sessions: students will be expected to sign up at the beginning of the block or week, and if they sign up **must** attend. They **must** be marked as unsatisfactory if not done so.
3. The attendance at the end of the Block **must** be signed off by the Educational Supervisor. Each Block lead will have access to attendance registers for the teaching events. They will also have feedback from the consultant and other clinical staff. The Block lead will require

evidence that the student's attendance is satisfactory in order for them to be signed off on the e-portfolio.

## 2.2 Sick Leave

Students will be able to 'self-certificate' for up to one week (5 working days) and complete a self-certification form which is available through Moodle. The Medical School **must** keep a record of all sick leave. If the student is ill for more than one week, then he/she must obtain a sick note from the GP or consultant and complete the certification form. Where students are ill for prolonged periods or on repeated occasions, then this information **must** be made available to the Concerns Group and the Concerns Action Plan must include a period of catch-up of learning opportunities. An important part of this process will be to ensure that adequate support structures are in place for the student. It **may** be appropriate for students with repeated ill-health, or prolonged ill health (e.g. 3 weeks in Phase 2) to withdraw from the course temporarily by requesting a temporary withdrawal from the programme.

**Note: if students find themselves having to deal with difficult situations and are concerned about taking leave, it is much better to come and discuss the matter early with their Personal Tutor or Student Support for example. This applies even if the Medical School has to make contingency plans, which may or may not be required. In addition, if an acute situation develops, the student should email the Medical School and leave appropriate contact details which will be forwarded to the appropriate person in the School.**

The 5 working day ruling is suspended, during assessment and qualifying examination periods, when it is the responsibility of students to seek medical help as soon as possible for any ill health experienced during, or near to, the examinations. A medical certificate **must** be produced to explain any absence from assessments. It is the responsibility of the student to produce medical evidence of fitness to continue or resume study, or to acquire such evidence by the date specified by the Medical School.

**Note: Such evidence will only be accepted from the student's registered GP, Occupational Health or Pastoral specialist and not from any family or friend irrespective of whether they are medically qualified.**

## 2.3 Compassionate leave

If a close family member or close friend has either a severe life-threatening illness or severe accident then the student will be entitled to request compassionate leave. The same will apply for bereavement. The amount of leave granted will depend on the circumstances and will be dealt with on an individual basis in consultation with a Personal Tutor or Phase lead in consultation with the Student Support Lead. This will involve an action plan to be put into place when the student returns to the medical school to mitigate any educational impact that may have occurred.

## 2.4 Medical Appointments

If the student has an ongoing health condition that requires regular medical assessment, evidence **must** be provided including details of any appointments. The School **must** be notified with an exceptional absence request as soon as the appointment date is known.

## 2.5 *Performance of prayers during teaching hours and during clinical placements in Phase 1 and Phase 2*

In Phase 1, students **must** attend all scheduled teaching, and all students **must** offer an explanation for any absences from taught sessions. The design of the curriculum, group work and self-directed learning structure do not allow for repeated missed sessions, and such absenteeism will be reported as a professionalism concern. All students in Phase 1 **must** seek advice from the Equality and Diversity Lead regarding the options for prayer sessions including times and locations as well as religious festivals to avoid missing scheduled teaching sessions.

During clinical placements in Phase 1 and Phase 2 all students will be expected to spend the day on the ward or in practice participating in ward rounds, attending clinics and theatre sessions. The GMC '*Achieving Good Medical Practice*' states that all students must "make the care of your patient your first concern". Medical student clinical attachments are regarded as an 'apprenticeship' and on some occasions students will have direct responsibility for patient care, while on the remaining occasions they will share that responsibility with the clinical team. In these settings, the care of the patient is the student's first concern. During the clinical day, there are likely to be natural breaks when it is possible to go and pray. Even as a student it is not appropriate to leave a clinical area to which they have been formally attached if there is direct clinical work taking place and in which the student is included. This encompasses ward rounds, clinics and theatre sessions, and in these settings, it is not appropriate to leave the environment without permission and while clinical activity is on-going. However, even in these settings there will be a number of natural breaks that can be utilised. Some clinical attachments will be more flexible and it will be possible to leave the clinical environment for short periods. In all cases if a student does wish to leave the clinical environment, other than during natural breaks, then they need to seek permission from the consultant in charge before the start of the session. Teaching sessions will also be arranged during the clinical attachments, and these may be seminars, bed-side teaching, X-ray meetings or observed clinical practice and it is not appropriate for a student to leave during a teaching session. Again, there will almost certainly be natural breaks before and after set teaching times

## 3 *Requests for exceptional absence*

All students will have timetabled periods of leave during each year of the course. Any student requiring additional leave **must** request permission well in advance from the Medical School and provide supporting evidence where possible. Four weeks' notice is normally required (except compassionate leave). **Exceptional absence is NOT additional holiday entitlement.** The following principles **must** be used to decide if permission will be granted and each request will be considered on an individual basis and will be discretionary depending upon the stage of study:

### 3.1 *Educational activities*

Students **must** request leave if they wish to attend medical conferences or other educational activities. Leave will normally be granted provided the student is contributing to the conference by giving a presentation or a poster presentation. Typically, these will be the result of previous work within the course and the expectation that the student will be representing the University and enhancing the reputation of the Medical School. This will normally be allowed on only **one** occasion during the course and **must** not be during a summative assessment period.

### 3.2 Professional development

Some students may be members of committees. If these committees are part of the University structure, then attendance at the committee is accepted as part of the normal student activity. It is, however, important to inform the relevant Block or Unit Lead of any absence. Students may also be members of national committees. Any leave requirements **must** be discussed with the Medical School Student Support Lead and decisions will be made on an individual basis. Providing the meetings are limited in number, then permission will normally be granted. The decision will depend on the particular Block/Unit involved, academic progress and the timing of any assessments. There may be other events linked with professional development for example careers fairs. In all cases, permission **must** be obtained and decisions will be based on the general principles already outlined.

### 3.3 Extramural activities

These activities typically include sporting or charity related events. **Other special events will be considered on an individual basis.** Any request **must** be carefully and fully justified. Our guidelines are as follows:

1. The period of leave will be for a maximum of one week. The exact period will depend on the nature of the request.
2. If the student is attending a sporting or charity-related event, they must be doing so as a representative of the University. There is a clear expectation that their participation will enhance the reputation of the Medical School.
3. The period of absence should not occur at a key time in a Unit or Block, and **must** not coincide with a summative assessment. An individual student will normally be granted only one such request during the course.
4. Authorised absence will be dependent on a student's current attendance record and at the discretion of the Student Support Team. Exceptional circumstances will be considered.
5. Rejected exceptional absence will remain on the student's record as unauthorised if the student is not in attendance

### 3.4 Religious festivals

Many religions and beliefs have special festivals or spiritual observance days and a student may wish to request leave. All requests for leave will be considered. Given the complexity of the curriculum it is not possible to design a timetable which allows for all religious observance. All students are advised to seek additional advice from the Equality and Diversity Lead in the Medical School with regard to specific arrangements that are available. As certain components of the course are regarded as core and compulsory, permitting students to be absent from these components may disadvantage them when it comes to examination.

The Medical School shall follow the following principles:

1. Request for leave for religious purposes should be for a limited period; normally one or two days in any given year.
2. The request **must** be made using the exceptional absence form online via Moodle.
3. Requests for leave **must** be made at least **14 days** prior to the date of the event. Some religious festivals are based on the lunar cycle and that the exact date is only known shortly beforehand. However, the date is predictable within one or two days and the request should indicate this. Requests submitted less than fourteen days prior to an event will **not** be approved.

4. Every effort will be made by the Medical School to avoid a student being required to sit an examination on the day of religious observance. However, the Medical School reserves the right to hold examinations on such days if no alternative time is possible.
5. Students are responsible for ensuring that any course work missed due to religious observance is covered at a subsequent time. Missing course work because of religious observance will not be accepted as mitigating circumstances for failure in exams.
6. Students who miss any sessions because of religious observance, without prior approval will be deemed to have unauthorised absence.

## 4 Overall Duration of Absences

### 4.1.1 Phase 1

Because of the nature of undergraduate medical training, **the longest time in total per academic year that a student may be absent is two weeks (10 working days) during Years 1 and 2.** This regulation will apply regardless of the reason for the absence. Students who exceed this threshold will be referred to the Concerns Group and Fitness to Practise proceedings may apply. Students who are permitted to return to the programme **must** be managed through an action plan that includes a period of catch up of learning opportunities. Students who exceed this 2-week threshold **may** apply for a temporary withdrawal from the programme.

### 4.1.2 Phase 2

**The longest time that a student may be absent from Phase 2 is three weeks in a calendar year (15 working days) in total** which reflects that of Foundation training. The reason that the maximum time is 3 weeks is that the maximum leeway in the programme for a student to 'recover' lost clinical education is 3 weeks. Any student who exceeds this threshold will be referred to the Concerns Group and Fitness to Practise proceedings may apply. Students who are permitted to return to the programme **must** be managed through an action plan that includes a period of catch up of learning opportunities. Students who exceed the 3-week threshold **may** apply for a temporary withdrawal from the programme.

**These requirements are set, not only to ensure that students learn efficiently but also so that all students understand the professional attitudes and responsibilities that are inherent in good attendance. The amount of annual leave available for students in Phase 2 is equivalent to that of a Foundation Doctor. The Medical School is fully aware that there will be a range of other occasions when a student may need to take leave. The key principle is that permission must be granted to take leave and all students must keep the appropriate people informed.**

## 5 Maternity and Paternity Leave

The Medical School understands that it is inevitable that some students, or their partners, will have a pregnancy during the course, and will need a period of leave. The first principle is that all students must meet the standards set by the Medical School and GMC in order to graduate. Within that requirement, the Medical School will facilitate, as a minimum the provision of maternity leave on broadly the same term as if the student were in employment, although it must be accepted however, that this will in some cases delay the date of graduation. Please see the *'Policy for Maternity, Paternity and Adoption for the MB ChB programme'*.

*Document Version Information*

Document Title: Attendance and Leave Policy

Originator: Claire Stocker

Date: revised 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016, Claire Stocker/Jessica Wilmore revised July 20<sup>th</sup> 2017

Replacing Document: 2015

Approved:

Date: