



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 undergraduate medical programme 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 practicing 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 (scheduled holiday) 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, every year.

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.

2 Attendance and absence procedures

2.1 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). 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 the course, and those records must be taken into account in any consideration of mitigating circumstances or appeals against course termination.

2.1.1 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 community GP practices. Students **must** attend all the teaching that is scheduled, including group work, workshops and sessions as required.

2.1.2 Phase 2

Phase 2 is a full-time course and **must** be considered the same as full time employment. 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 and workshops 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 and integral to your professional development.

Attendance at all didactic teaching sessions, is compulsory. Students will be expected to sign up to 'sign-up sessions' at the beginning of the Block or week, and if they sign up, **must** attend. They **must** be marked as unsatisfactory if they have not done so.

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. The Block Lead will require evidence that the student's attendance is satisfactory in order for them to be signed off in the e-portfolio.

2.2 Reporting Absences

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 practicing doctor. Failure to do so will mean that the absence is registered as unauthorised, and **must** be considered to be evidence of unprofessional conduct and as such **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.

The Medical School expects all students to manage absences correctly.

- **For short-term illness** (sick leave) students **must** use the electronic self-certification form on Moodle and the student app, see **section 2.3**.
- **For all other absences**, the student **must** complete the electronic exceptional absence request form on Moodle and the student app, see **section 2.4**.

For all absences, students **must** also notify:

- the relevant Unit Lead or Placement Provider (Phase 1) or
- the Block Lead, Placement Provider and Block Administrator (Phase 2)

In certain circumstances, students may be requested to attend an Occupational Health assessment prior to return to studies at the request of the Student Support Lead.

2.3 Sick Leave

Students will be able to 'self-certificate' for up to one week (five working days) and complete a self-certification form. 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, 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 to withdraw from the course temporarily by requesting a temporary withdrawal from the MB ChB programme.

The five 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 sit the exams and 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 professional specialist and not from any family or friend irrespective of whether they are medically qualified.

2.4 Exceptional Absence

The Medical School recognises that there may be unavoidable exceptional circumstances that may prevent a student from attending on a particular day.

Exceptional absence request forms submitted online will be assessed according to the circumstance, number of days of absences already recorded for the student, the time and nature of the request, and will be either approved or rejected at the discretion of the Medical School. Each request will be considered on an individual basis and will be discretionary depending upon the stage of study. Any requests must be supported by evidence where applicable. Exceptional absence is NOT additional holiday entitlement. If a request is rejected but the student takes the time off, this will be deemed as an unauthorised absence.

Note: if students find themselves having to deal with difficult situations and are concerned about taking leave, it is much better to discuss the matter early with their Personal Tutor or the Student Support team. This applies even if the Medical School has to make contingency plans, which may or may not be required.

2.4.1 Medical Appointments

Wherever possible, medical appointments should always be made outside of teaching time. If a student has an ongoing health condition that requires regular medical assessment, a request may be submitted for each appointment with accompanying evidence. For other medical appointments, requests will be assessed on an individual basis and evidence **must** be provided. The Medical School **must** be notified of an exceptional absence request as soon as the appointment date is known.

2.4.2 Compassionate leave

If a close family member or dependent has either a severe life-threatening illness or severe accident then the student may 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 **may** require an action plan and conditions for return to be put into place to mitigate any educational impact that may have occurred.

2.4.3 Religious festivals

Many religions and beliefs have special festivals or spiritual observance days and a student may wish to request leave. 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. 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. If unsure, please contact the Student Support office in advance to ask for advice about the request. **Requests submitted less than fourteen days prior to an event, without prior consultation, will not be approved.**
3. 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.
4. 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.

2.4.4 Maternity/Paternity/Adoption leave

The Medical School understands that some students, or their partners, will have a pregnancy or adoption 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/paternity/adoption 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](#)' for more details.

2.4.5 Visa/Passport renewals

Some international students may need to renew visas or passports during their time at the Medical School. Requests for leave **must** be made as soon as an appointment has been made and proof of the appointment submitted with the form. Where possible, appointments **must** be made outside of teaching time.

2.4.6 Educational activities

Students **must** request leave if they wish to attend medical conferences or other educational activities. Leave will be considered provided the student is contributing to the conference by giving an oral 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. Requests for leave **must** be made at least **14 days** prior to the date of the event and evidence provided by the conference organizer.

2.4.7 Professional development

Students may wish to develop their professional interests by attending external sessions such as seminars or careers fairs. Leave requests **must** be applied for using the exceptional absence request form and subsequently a discussion had with the Student Support Lead. Decisions will be made on an individual basis and will depend on the particular Block/Unit involved, academic progress and the timing of any assessments and previous leave requests. The event **must** not be during a summative assessment period. Requests for leave **must** be made at least **14 days** prior to the date of the event.

2.4.8 Extramural activities

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. Leave requests **must** be applied for using the exceptional absence request form and subsequently a discussion had with the Student Support Lead. Decisions will be made on an individual basis and will depend on the particular Block/Unit involved, academic progress and the timing of any assessments and previous leave requests. The event **must** not be during a summative assessment period. Requests for leave **must** be made at least **14 days** prior to the date of the event.

Some students may be involved with activities such as sporting or charity related events. Leave requests **must** be applied for using the exceptional absence request form and subsequently a discussion had with the Student Support Lead. Decisions will be made on an individual basis and will depend on the request, the particular Block/Unit involved, academic progress and the timing of any assessments and previous leave requests. Requests for leave **must** be made at least **14 days** prior to the date of the event. This type of leave will normally be allowed on only **one** occasion during the course and **must** not be during a summative assessment period.

Our guidelines are as follows:

1. The period of leave will be up to 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. Authorised absence will be dependent on a student's current attendance record and at the discretion of the Student Support Team.

2.4.9 Other Exceptional Absence requests

The Medical School recognises that other exceptional absences may occur e.g. carer/dependant responsibilities; jury service and other unforeseen circumstances. All requests must be received via the online exceptional absence request and will be considered on an individual basis. Requests must be supported by evidence where applicable and where dates are known in advance requests **must** be made at least **14 days** prior to the date of the event.

3 Overall Duration of Absences

3.1. Phase 1

In Phase 1, each teaching day at the Medical School is normally divided into a lecture and a group work session, each part counted as a learning event. **Satisfactory attendance is 100% of all scheduled learning events**, and attendance is monitored at each. Because of the nature of undergraduate medical training, **the longest time in total per calendar year that a student may be absent is two weeks (10 working days) or the equivalent of 20 learning events**. Students who exceed this threshold will receive an official warning letter from the Concerns Committee and a concern will be raised. Further absences will result in a meeting with the Head of School where a decision may be taken to withhold a student from examinations or require a student to withdraw temporarily from the course and to return at the beginning of the year from which they withdrew, in accordance with the MB ChB General Regulations.

3.2. Phase 2, Electives and Assistantships

In 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 receive an official warning letter from the Concerns Committee and a concern will be raised. Further absences will result in a meeting with the Head of School where a decision may be taken to withhold a student from examinations or require a student to withdraw temporarily from the course and to return at the beginning of the rotation during which they withdrew, in accordance with the MB ChB General Regulations.

4 Performance of prayers during teaching hours and during clinical placements in Phase 1 and Phase 2

All students in Phase 1 **must** seek advice from the Equality and Diversity Lead regarding the options for prayer sessions including times and locations 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

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