



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BUCKINGHAM

MEDICAL SCHOOL

**MB ChB**

# **Attendance and Leave Entitlements Policy**

## 1 Introduction

The Medical School stipulates that all students must meet the standards and learning outcomes set by the MB ChB programme Regulations, in accordance with the General Medical Council's Tomorrow's Doctors, 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. For medical students at the University there is no rule allowing a proportion of time off before a student is deemed unsatisfactory. Satisfactory attendance is 100% due to the nature of the curriculum design, educational model and the required learning outcomes of all students. The University also has some general expectations about attendance of all students which are defined in the University of Buckingham Handbook 'Governing student obligations'.

## 2 Requests for exceptional absence

All students will have certain defined periods of leave during each year of the course. Any student requiring further leave must ask permission well in advance from the Medical School. Four weeks' notice is normally required (except compassionate leave). The following principles will be used to decide if permission will be granted:

### 2.1 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 Unit or Block Lead.

### 2.2 Educational activities

A number of students may request leave to attend medical conferences or other educational activities. Leave will 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 will not be during an assessment period.

### 2.3 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 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. In all cases, permission must be obtained and decisions will be based on the general principles already outlined.

## 2.4 Extramural activities

These activities typically include sporting or charity related events. Other special events will be considered on an individual basis. Any request will have to 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 should not coincide with an assessment. An individual student will normally be granted only one such request during the course.

## 3 Duration of Leave

### 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 cannot continue on the course but can apply for a Suspension of Studies.

### Phase 2

The longest time that a student may be absent from Phase 2 rotations is three weeks (15 working days) in total. The reason that the chosen maximum time is 3 weeks is that the maximum leeway in the programme for a student to 'recover' lost clinical education is 3 weeks. In the case of a student in the Junior Clinical Rotation the student will not be able to sit the IPE exam but can instead gain the three weeks missed experience during the gap between the IPE and IPE Resit Exam and then sit the IPE Resit Exam. In the case of a student in the Senior Clinical Rotation, the student will not be able to sit the Final Professional Exam but can instead 'recover' lost clinical education in the 3 weeks at the end of the Senior Clinical Rotation. Such a student will take the Final Resit Exam and will have reduced time for their Student Elective. Students who exceed the three week threshold cannot continue on the course but can apply for Suspension of Studies.

### 3.1 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 the Medical School Office or Student Support Team. The Medical School will 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 will be made available to the Concerns Group. 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. 2 weeks in Phase 2) to withdraw from the course temporarily by requesting a Suspension of Studies.

**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 resit, 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.**

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 limited, and 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.

### *3.2 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 and some examples where a student might find themselves.

### *3.3 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 in a similar manner to that for exceptional absence.
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. The request must be made using the exceptional absence request form. Providing leave has been granted, the exact date can be confirmed as soon as it is known. 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 be absent without approval.

## *4 Attendance and absence procedures*

### **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 are expected to attend all the teaching that is scheduled; however, the Medical School recognises that occasional absence 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 once a student has qualified. Failure to do so is considered to be evidence of unprofessional conduct and the student's behaviour will be monitored more closely.

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 absence in Phase 1 correctly:

- For unexpected absences (e.g. short-term illness) students will: Notify the Medical School Secretary (who will then notify the relevant Unit Leads) that they will be absent and as soon as possible on return to Medical School, must complete a self-certification for absence form, available from the Medical School Office.

- 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, available from the Medical School Office, which should be completed and submitted at least one week before the expected date of absence or it may not be considered. It is, however, by no means guaranteed that a student's request will be granted. A self-certification for absence form must also be completed even if a student's request for exceptional absence has been granted.

## Phase 2

The following additional principles apply to leave during the latter years of the course:

1. Phase 2 is a full time course and is 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 notify the Medical School Office and Block Lead, and complete the self-certification form. The rules about self-certification and medical certificates are as if students were employed by the hospital.
4. If a student requests leave this must be through completion of the exceptional leave form available from the Medical School Office.

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 it is essential that students at the hospital attend these sessions. They form the basis of the learning and preparation of students to become competent doctors.

### *4.1 Attendance and teaching sessions*

Teaching session within the Units:

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, will be expected to attend, and will be marked as unsatisfactory if not done so.
3. The attendance at the end of the block must be signed off by the Block Lead. Each 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.

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

In Phase 1, students are expected to 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 Dr Joanne Selway ([Joanne.selway@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:Joanne.selway@buckingham.ac.uk)) 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 '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 utilized. 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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