

**Student Attendance, Punctuality and Fitness to Study Policy**

**LOCAL POLICY**

Version 4

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**Corporate Development**

Belfast Metropolitan College

Building 1, Room 9

Castlereagh Campus

Montgomery Road

Belfast. BT6 9DJ

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**Further Information**

For further information about the content of this policy please contact:

**Department of Learner Success – Room 2:020**

Belfast Metropolitan College

Titanic Quarter Campus

7 Queens Road

Belfast

BT3 9DT

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# **1. Introduction**

Belfast Metropolitan College is aware of the enormous investment that learners make, both in time and finance, in choosing to pursue a course at the College. Belfast Metropolitan Collegeencourages students to attend College consistently, recognising that their commitment to attend regularly indicates a commitment to make the most of all the learning opportunities available. In addition, regular and punctual attendance are qualities expected by employers, and therefore the College seeks to develop these qualities in all its students.

The implementation of this policy should in no way be regarded as a reduction in the rights which students have to voice their concerns about the quality of service which they receive from the College. These concerns will continue to be dealt with according to the relevant College policies. Likewise, students who require them will continue to have access to College support services and some students due to extenuating circumstances may avail of reasonable adjustments as appropriate.

# **2. Policy Aim**

2.1 This policy aims to ensure a consistent approach to student attendance in all areas of the College, and to ensure that all students understand their attendance requirements.

2.2 The College recognises that, in order to obtain maximum benefit from their programme, students should aim for full attendance at programmed sessions, including tutorials, essential skills and enrichment modules, where applicable. This policy sets out clearly the expectations and constraints on attendance.

2.3 It is the policy of Belfast Met to encourage full attendance and timely arrival for class.

2.4 Reasonable adjustments may be made to attendance requirements based on medical evidence or proof of extenuating circumstances.

# **3. Scope and Objectives of the Policy**

3.1 This policy applies to all students enrolled on a College programme of any duration.

3.2 Where a course has an attendance requirement specified by its awarding body, the more robust attendance requirement (College or awarding body) will take precedence.

3.3 Separate arrangements may be applied for international students studying under a study visa with specifically stated attendance requirements.

3.4 This policy sets out the College’s underpinning principles on attendance and punctuality.

3.5 This policy clearly states the required standards for attendance and punctuality.

3.6 This policy outlines the actions to be taken to achieve the policy aim.

# **4. Principles**

4.1 The College expects full attendance at all classes by its students. The College believes that good attendance and punctuality are necessary in order to promote maximum achievement in learning.

4.2 The College will record attendance data accurately to ensure that it meets its obligations with regards to funding.

4.3 The College recognises that, in managing an individual’s attendance and punctuality, a number of different strategies may be applied according to individual circumstances.

4.4 The College believes that, in order to ensure high standards of attendance and punctuality, close monitoring and corrective action are necessary where there is cause for concern.

4.5 The College believes that parents/carers and employers\* have a role to play in supporting high standards of attendance and punctuality.

\* Under current legislation, parents/carers of students cannot be kept informed of issues relating to their child’s progress at College unless the student gives their express permission for this to happen. Information on student progress can also be released to employers/supporting organisations if they pay the student’s fees or facilitate day-release arrangements for the student, and the student has given consent for this to happen. The student has the right to withdraw consent at any time.

1. **Attendance**

# **5. Standard**

Full attendance is expected for all classes and timetabled activities. (Reasonable adjustments may be accommodated where appropriate).

# **6. Students’ responsibility to attain this standard**

6.1 Students enrol to undertake an agreed programme of study. Student attendance at lessons is an important factor in helping their achievement. All students are expected to strive for full attendance.

6.2 If a student is aware when enrolling on a course or programme that full attendance may pose a problem due to extenuating circumstances, this should be discussed with the course tutor. In such circumstances adjustments can be made to accommodate students, but these must be agreed in advance with the College. Students will be advised about the process required to put these arrangements into place. However, once in place, students will be expected to adhere to this policy, taking into account the adjustments made.

6.3 The same applies to punctuality. If students are continually late, they will put themselves at a disadvantage by missing important parts of the curriculum, and in the long-term risk not achieving the grades/qualifications that they need to progress to higher education and/or employment.

6.4 The College understands that occasionally students and their family circles may have problems but expects students to make their attendance at College a priority. They should only take time off if they are ill, or if there is a major family emergency or bereavement. Notification of absences should be made to designated staff members.

6.5 Belfast Met supports students from a wide variety of faiths and none. We acknowledge that religious observance may sometimes clash with course delivery, and that this may cause a conflict for the student.

6.6 The College provides a number of quiet rooms for students to take time out to reflect and/or pray outside of class time e.g., during breaks. If this proves difficult, the student should discuss their desire to practise their faith with their lecturer and/or course tutor to see if an agreement can be reached. The lecturer/course tutor can contact the Equality and Good Relations Officer for advice, if required.

# **7. Authorised (Planned) and Unauthorised Absences**

7.1Absences are unauthorised unless proven otherwise. It is the responsibility of the student to justify why an absence should be authorised. In circumstances where no official adjustments have been made for a student, absences can be authorised only for specific reasons when evidence is produced to the curriculum area.

7.2 If an absence is known in advance, the student is expected to seek authorisation for this absence.

7.3 Each School should decide which staff should give authorisation and devise a means to ensure that all relevant staff are informed in advance of any authorised absence.

7.4 Further details of authorised and unauthorised absences are contained in Appendix 1.

# **8. Actions a student should take if they are absent**

If a student is absent, the College will only authorise their absence later when it has been informed of the reason and if it is justified.

Following an absence, it is the student’s responsibility to find out what work has been missed and to ensure that it is completed before the next class.

Lecturers will mark the attendance register at the start of each session of the College day. Registers will be marked no later than 15 minutes after the start of each session.

When a lecturer completes the register at the start of each class, he/she will mark the student as: -

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Mark** | **Description** |  |
| **P** | Present | Those who attend start of session or within the first 15 minutes |
| **A** | Authorised Absence | Student/parent or guardian has contacted the College with viable reason for absence as detailed in Appendix 1 |
| **UA** | Unauthorised Absence | No contact has been made or reason is not deemed as authorised |
| **L** | Late | The student arrived more than 15 minutes late |
| **S** | Sickness | See 8.1 or 8.2 below, dependent upon programme of study |
| **E** | Study Leave | The entire class was given time out of class to revise |
| **V** | Virtual /Blended Learning | The course or module was taught by on-line material |
| **X** | Suspension | Training students only |
| **Z** | Authorised Absence – College Exception | Exceptional closure e.g., due to adverse weather conditions |

Table of Student Marking Options

**COVID**

The guidance below is to clarify the marks that are to be used in different scenarios relating to COVID:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| COVID |  |
| Scenario | Mark to use |
| Student is isolating/In quarantine and is engaging online | Blended Learning |
| Student has COVID, is unable to engage online and has sent in proof. | Sick (with proof) |
| Student has COVID, is unable to engage online and has not sent in proof. | Unauthorised Absence |
| Student is working from home as scheduled on their timetable and is engaging online | Blended Learning |
| Student is working from home as scheduled on their timetable and is not engaging online | Unauthorised Absence |

Covid Scenarios Table

If the reason for the absence is not listed and you are still unsure mark the student by default as Unauthorised Absence then check with your Curriculum Area Manager.

Please follow the steps below:

**Step 1** – Check your Staff Timetable located in ontrack. Check day, time, room and start dates are correct for each class. Contact your CAM if not.

**Step 2** – Check students are correct on your register and mark them.

**Step 3** – If students are showing incorrectly on your register do the following-

* If a student is not appearing on your register add their name manually (this will not enrol them officially), you must advise school admin who will update the student’s enrolment.
* If an incorrect student is appearing on your register mark them as Unauthorised Absence (U) and report to school admin.

8.1 **Absence due to illness – Further or Higher Education Student**

If a student needs to stay at home because of illness, the student should notify the College in line with instructions given at induction. Until the student informs the College why they are absent, they will be marked as an ‘unauthorised’ absence. Students must produce a medical certificate for an absence of more than 5 days due to a previously undisclosed condition.

**Absence due to illness - Training Programme Student**

Skills and Apprenticeship students are required to report the reason and likely duration of absence on the first morning of illness to their Campus Skills Hub. The Hub will then advise the skills support coach and the course team. They can also ring/ text the absence phone line 07918678433 or e mail [dcampbell@belfastmet.ac.uk](mailto:dcampbell@belfastmet.ac.uk).

If the student does not contact the designated person, he/she will be marked as an ‘unauthorised’ absence and their training allowance will be deducted accordingly. After five consecutive unauthorised absences the student will be removed from programme.

For Training Programmes, students with 5 consecutive unauthorised absences will be immediately removed from the programme. If there are extenuating circumstances, please advise Diane Campbell on 07918678433 or e mail [dcampbell@belfastmet.ac.uk](mailto:dcampbell@belfastmet.ac.uk)

**ApprenticeshipsNI**

Regular attendance is essential for the successful achievement of the qualifications listed in your training framework. In accordance with Department for the Economy requirements “Any participant who has not attended the training element of their ApprenticeshipsNI course for 4 consecutive weeks, in contravention of the PTP agreement and without the formal agreement of the employer, will be immediately removed from the provision.”

It is important that you complete and sign any directed training records issued to you by college staff to demonstrate your attendance is in line with the attendance arrangements set out in the PTP agreement.

You will also have attendance arrangements laid out by your employer in the terms and conditions of your employment contract. Please advise your college staff contact in advance of any holidays /special leave or work commitments that might affect your attendance and progress on the course.

8.2 **Absence due to** **illness whilst in College**

If a student falls ill during the College day, they should report to their course tutor or designated person. With the student’s permission, the tutor/designated person can contact the student’s emergency contact if necessary. The student should not go home during the College day without informing the College.

8.3 **Absence due to an appointment**

If a student needs to leave College during timetabled classes because they have an appointment, they must inform their School Administrator, Course Co-ordinator, Year Head, Course Tutor or any other person designated by the School. As far as possible, appointments should be made outside College hours, so that their programme of study is not interrupted.

8.4 **Absence due to an accident whilst in College**

If a student cannot attend class due to an accident requiring medical intervention, this should be reported using current College procedures.

8.5 **Absence of students in receipt of EMA, Learner Support Fund/Care to Learn funding**

Students in receipt of EMA, Learner Support Fund or Care to Learn funding must explain the reasons for any non-attendance at College. Failure to do so will lead to non-payment.

8.6 **Absence during the College day**

If a student is marked present at the start of a morning session, and then absent during the day without permission, once reported to them the School Administrator or other designated person will follow up on the absence.

8.7 **Authorised or unauthorised absence**

If a student has a reason for being absent which the College decides is justified, their absence will be marked as ‘authorised’. If their reason for absence is unjustified, or if they do not provide a reason for their absence, their absence will be marked as ‘unauthorised’. Further details are provided in Appendix 1.

8.8 **Absence from Examinations**

Students must attend all exams listed on their examination timetable. Misreading the timetable will not be accepted as a satisfactory explanation for absence. Students will be charged the entry fee if they do not attend an exam that has been paid for by the College. If they are going to miss an exam due to illness, students must telephone their School Administrator/designated person as soon as possible on the morning of the exam. A voicemail message can be left if no one answers. A medical certificate / letter must also be given or sent to the School Administrator/designated person within three days of the missed exam.

# **9. College Responsibilities to help students to attain this standard**

9.1 Students will be made aware at induction of College standards and of the consequences of failure to meet the standards. This message should be reinforced at all opportunities throughout their period of study in the College.

9.2 Schools will identify students at risk who show patterns of poor attendance. Patterns may vary, but could include any examples from the following non-exhaustive list:

* failure to attend any 3 classes in a week without suitable explanation
* explanations are inconsistent or of a nature to give cause for concern
* a pattern of missing particular days or particular classes.
* attendance less than 80% over a 3 week period

Prompt action must be taken to address attendance and punctuality issues.

9.3 Consistent monitoring of “at risk” students will continue and will involve the class teacher, Personal Tutor/Adviser of Studies/Year Head/Course Co-ordinator, Curriculum Area Manager and Head of School.

9.4 If there is no improvement, the Student Disciplinary Policy will be invoked. See Appendix 2 for guidance.

9.5 In the administration of EMA, the college will follow EMA Department for the Economy guidance, supported by College Standard Operational Procedures.

9.6 Students who are dismissed or who voluntarily withdraw will be offered an exit interview and will be ‘withdrawn’ from their programme of study.

9.7 Students who fail to attend classes for more than 4 weeks will be considered for course withdrawal by the curriculum management team and informed of any such decision in writing.

9.8 In the case of Training Programmes, students with 5 consecutive unauthorised absences will be immediately removed from the programme.

9.9 If attendance has been an issue across the academic year and is below 80% with no extenuating circumstances, the following sanctions may be imposed at the discretion of the School Curriculum Management Team:

* Student must pay their own exam entry fees
* Students may be refused progression to the next academic year
* Students may be refused restart requests to the same programme of study
* Students may be refused restart to another programme of study at the same level of provision. (e.g., Level 2, Level 3 etc.)

9.10 At the end of each academic year, the curriculum management team will assess for withdrawal all students with an attendance rate of under 80%. If progression is permitted, this will be conditional on the production to the required standard of any missing coursework and on the close monitoring of attendance and punctuality during the first term/semester of the next academic year.

**B. Punctuality**

# **10. Standard**

Students are expected to be on time for all classes and timetabled activities. (Some students, due to extenuating circumstances, may have lateness approved as a reasonable adjustment.)

# **11. Responsibilities of students to attain this standard**

11.1 Students should allow sufficient time to leave their home/place of work and to arrive before the start of classes.

11.2 Students should ensure that they leave other College facilities on time to arrive for the start of class.

11.3 Students should familiarise themselves with their course timetable.

11.4 Students who know that they are likely to be late for class should inform designated staff in line with the instructions given at induction.

# **12. Responsibilities of the College to help students to attain this standard**

12.1 The College will ensure that this policy is communicated to all students. At induction, students will be made aware of this standard and of the consequences of failure to reach it. This message should be reinforced at all opportunities throughout the students’ period of study in the College.

12.2 It is important that classes start and finish at the scheduled time. It is the responsibility of the class teacher to ensure that all classes start and finish on time.

12.3 At the start of the year, students must be issued with a copy of their timetable showing the start and finish times and the location of their classes. Students should be notified of any subsequent changes, and timetabled sessions must be cancelled only in exceptional and unavoidable circumstances.

12.4 Teachers should deal with students who come late in a manner in keeping with good classroom management practice.

12.5 Monitoring of punctuality should be carried out in line with School procedures. (See Appendix 3 for guidance)

12.6 Persistent late coming will result in the application of the Student Disciplinary Policy. Please see Appendix 2 for guidance.

# **13. International Students**

To keep students and the College in full compliance with the law, additional attendance conditions apply to international students who are subject to the Right to Study visa conditions and immigration controls.  These are over and above the standards already outlined in this policy, which apply to all students.

13.1       Attendance and punctuality are important for student success and progression, but they are also a condition of a visa to study and remain in the United Kingdom. If you got your student visa using a CAS from Belfast Met your sponsor will report you:

* if you fail to enrol on your course within the enrolment period;
* if you miss 10 expected contacts without your educational sponsor’s permission;
* if your sponsor stops being your sponsor for any other reason, for example, if you move in to an immigration category that does not need a student visa sponsor;
* if there are any significant changes in your circumstances, for example, if the length of a course of study becomes shorter;
* any suspicions they may have that you are breaking the conditions of your permission to stay.

13.4 All genuine reasons for non-attendance must be reported or agreed in advance, as outlined in this policy.

13.5 Authorised absences may be taken into account when reporting to the UKVI or for visa renewals.  The number of absences may affect the success of visa renewals.

# **14. Fitness to Study**

14.1 The College wants all students to achieve their potential by completing their studies successfully and progressing to further future success. For this to be a realistic achievement, students must maintain a satisfactory level of attendance.

14.2 While it is reasonable for curriculum and support staff to be flexible on a temporary basis, prolonged periods of absence cannot be sustained. If a student falls significantly behind their deadlines for assessment submission, despite extensions being offered, there comes a point were catching up is not viable. Consequently,

* + There may be times when the nature of a student’s ill-health requires support beyond the expertise or capacity that the College can reasonably offer.
  + In instances where a student’s ill health presents an unmanageable health and safety risk to either themselves or to others in the College educational setting a risk assessment may be carried out. In such circumstances it is reasonable for the College to ask the student to produce a letter from their G.P. advising the College of the student’s fitness to study.

14.3 These situations impact negatively on both the student and the College. There are therefore occasions where, for one or more of the reasons cited above, the curriculum management team may determine that continuing at the College is no longer in the best interests of the student. If the curriculum management team makes that decision, they will inform the student in writing of their withdrawal from their course of study.

14.4 Under certain circumstances the curriculum management team may advise a student to restart the academic year again; in these circumstances medical evidence must be supplied to confirm the student’s fitness to study (GP letter). A student can only ever restart an academic year once.

14.5 On occasions the College may be advised by medical specialists that it is unsafe for students to attend. This advice will always supersede College policy and the student will not be able to attend until the College receives medical evidence advising of the student’s return to fitness to study.

14.6

With respect to programs of study that will lead to professional registration, students are required to demonstrate their Professional Suitability and Fitness to Practice. Suitability and fitness for professional work include qualities such as patience, honesty, integrity, resilience, and the ability to help people face difficult situations. Evidence of clear thinking, sound judgment, sensitivity, and tolerance is required, together with the ability to establish and maintain appropriate personal and professional boundaries. Professional Suitability and Fitness to Practice demand sound interpersonal and communication skills as well as both physical and mental ability to carry out the role appropriately. If a student is the subject of concerns about their suitability and fitness to practice, the curriculum team must adhere to the Student Fitness to Practice Standard Operating Procedure.

# **15. Summary of the Attendance and Punctuality Policy**

* + Students must aim for full and punctual attendance for all classes and timetabled activities. (Reasonable adjustments may apply as appropriate.)
  + Students should discuss with the College formally, and at the earliest possible stage, any issues such as disability, caring responsibilities etc. which might impact on their attendance. Where possible, the College will make all reasonable adjustments to accommodate the student’s attendance on the course or programme.
  + Students need to let the College know why they are absent in line with school procedures as advised at induction.
  + Absence can be authorised by the College under certain circumstances.
  + Medical and dental appointments should be made out of College hours. If unavoidable, a student should bring evidence to their course tutor in advance of the appointment.
  + Lecturers will mark a register for each class they take during the day. Lateness or absence will be recorded and followed up by the curriculum team.
  + Holidays should not be taken in term time.
  + If a student’s attendance at College falls below 80% over a 3 week period, the Student Disciplinary Policy will normally be invoked.

# **16. Complaints**

It is hoped that we will be able to resolve any complaint through the complaints procedure. If the customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome they have the right to raise the matter with the Northern Ireland Ombudsman’s Office (in his/her role as Commissioner for Complaints).

The customer can complain to the Ombudsman; however, the Ombudsman will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College’s Customer Complaints Policy.

Contact details for the Ombudsman are:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Progressive House

33 Wellington Place

Belfast

BT1 6HN

# **17. Monitoring**

17.1 The College will establish appropriate information and monitoring systems to assist the effective implementation of this Student Attendance, Punctuality and Fitness to Study Policy.

17.2 The College will ensure that adequate resources are made available to promote this policy effectively to stakeholders.

# **18. Review**

18.1 This policy will be reviewed in August 2024.

# **APPENDIX 1 - Authorised (Planned) and Unauthorised Absences**

The guidance below corresponds to current EMA guidance.

1. The following would be considered suitable reasons for an authorised absence:
   * Visits to university/HE open days or career-related interviews
   * A work placement which is an integral part of the student’s course
   * Attendance at the funeral or wedding or civil ceremony of a close family member
   * Attendance at a probation meeting
   * Severe travel disruption to a student’s method of transport, that leaves the student with no method of travelling to school or college.
   * A driving lesson (not during taught classes)
   * A driving test
   * A family emergency, such as the need to look after a family member
   * Exceptional extra-curricular activities that represent a significant personal achievement, such as sports participation at a national or county level or voluntary work.
   * Medical appointments which cannot be made outside College hours (evidence must

be provided).

1. The following would be considered unacceptable reasons for an authorised absence on their own:
   * Holidays, as students are expected to take these outside of term-time.
   * Part-time or full-time work which is not part of a programme of study.
   * Leisure activities.
   * Birthdays or family celebrations (not including wedding, civil ceremonies).
   * Baby-sitting siblings (not including family emergencies).

1. These lists are not exhaustive. Each request should be considered on its own merits.
2. Illnesses may also be considered authorised absence. In particular:
   * After 5 days, all students must produce a medical certificate for a previously nondisclosed condition.
   * Students on a training programme must follow the stipulated absence process.
   * Care must be taken to monitor patterns of requests for authorised absence as these in themselves may constitute “at risk” behaviour.

# **APPENDIX 2 - Student Disciplinary and Student Support Interventions for student attendance/punctuality causes for concern**

Student disciplinary interventions and student support interventions should go hand in hand. One should not offset the other. The following table is for guidance only.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Student disciplinary interventions** | **Student support interventions** |
| **First intervention**  Student’s attendance gives cause for concern.  Apply classroom management techniques.  Call first progress review meeting between the student and designated staff (e.g. Class Tutor, AoS, Personal Tutor)  All intervention should be fully supportive at this stage. Please see the column to the right. | Alongside the systematic application of the student disciplinary policy, the following student support interventions should be considered:   * Talking to the student and advising them of your concerns for their academic progression in light of their poor attendance/punctuality. Asking them what difficulties they are facing in achieving good attendance/punctuality, and if the College could do anything further to help and support them * Making contact with the student’s parent/guardian (only with the student’s consent under GDPR) and advising them of the poor attendance/punctuality and asking for their support in dealing with it * Consider a Student Attendance Contract * Consider Centralised Morning Registration * Consider advising the student to make an appointment with their G.P. * Consider referring the student, with their consent, to the College’s Student Wellbeing team * Consider referring the student, with their consent, to Inspire - the College’s student counselling service * Consider referring the student, with their consent, to the College’s Careers and Employability team * Consider referring the student, with their consent, to the College’s Inclusive Learning team * Consider referring the student, with their consent, to the College’s Student Funding team |
| **Second intervention**  Call second progress review meeting between the student and the next most senior staff member (e.g. AOS/Course Coordinator/Year Head etc.)  Apply First Stage student disciplinary sanctions in line with the Student Disciplinary Policy, e.g. oral warning given by Class Lecturer/Course Co-ordinator for attendance below 80% over a 3 week period. |
| **Third intervention**  Call third progress review meeting between the student and the next most senior staff member (e.g. Course Co-ordinator/Year head/CAM).  Apply Second Stage student disciplinary sanctions in line with the Student Disciplinary Policy, e.g. first written warning given by Course Co-ordinator/ CAM if the student’s attendance remains below 80% for the 3 weeks following the oral warning. |
| **Fourth intervention**  Call fourth progress review meeting between the student and the next most senior staff member (CAM/ Head of Department).  Apply Third Stage student disciplinary sanctions in line with the Student Disciplinary Policy, e.g. final written warning given by the CAM/Head of Department if the student’s attendance remains below 80% for the 3 weeks following the 1st written warning. |
| **Fifth intervention:**  Call fifth progress review meeting between the student and the next most senior staff member (Head of Department/Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum and Partnerships))  Apply Fourth Stage student disciplinary sanctions in line with the Student Disciplinary Policy, e.g. the student is dismissed by the Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum and Partnerships). |

Table to show Student disciplinary interventions 1-5 and Student support interventions

**Appendix 3**

Punctuality Monitoring Procedure (Full Time Courses).
Step 1
Student arrives 10+ minutes late for class.
Must go to designated Late Arrival Station.

Step 2
Designated staff member records reason for lateness and issues signed permission slip.
Student can only be admitted to class by handing class tutor slip.

Step 3
AOS / CC / YH / CAM checks late record weekly.
Invokes disciplinary policy as appropriate.

Punctuality Monitoring Procedures