



Student Attendance, Punctuality and Fitness to Study Policy

LOCAL POLICY

Scope of Policy:	All Students
Policy Owner:	Head of Learner Success
Date of Initial Approval:	24/10/2021
Approved By:	Strategic Leadership Team
Status:	Current
Most Recent Publication Date:	29/06/2025
Equality Screening Date:	25/09/2009
Policy Review Date:	03/08/2026

Published by Belfast Metropolitan College www.belfastmet.ac.uk.

Belfast Metropolitan College ['Belfast Met'] is committed to providing publications that are accessible to all. To request additional copies of this publication in a different format please contact:

Corporate Development

Belfast Metropolitan College
Integrated Shared Services Centre
398 Springfield Road
Belfast. BT12 7DU

This document is only valid on the day it was printed. The master and control version of this document will remain with Corporate Development. Amended and approved versions of the policy must be sent to Corporate Development once approved. Final versions will be posted on the intranet by Corporate Development.

© Belfast Metropolitan College 5/10/16

You are welcome to copy this publication for your own use. Otherwise, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the copyright owner.

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

Policy Compliance details:-

Compliance with Equality Legislation.

PLEASE NOTE: Policies must be equality screened before being submitted to SLT and Trade Unions:-

Equality Screening Date:	25/09/2009
Equality Screening Outcome:	Screened Out
Sector or Local Screening:	Local Screening
Consultation Date (if applicable):	Not Applicable
Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) Date (if applicable):	Not Applicable
EQIA Key Outcomes:	Not Applicable

Document History

Version Number	Author	Updates/Amendments	Date
1.0	Learner Success	GDPR compliance	August 2018
2.0	Learner Success	Policy transferred to new format	04/02/2019
3.0	Learner Success	Policy updated to align with revised Student Disciplinary Policy and extended to include fitness to study	02/03/2020
4.0	Learner Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 8 codes updated in line with EBS 9.5 amended to read. "In the administration of EMA, the college will follow EMA Department for the Economy guidance, supported by College Standard Operational Procedures." Appendix 1 updated in line with current EMA guidance. 	September 2021
4.0	Learner Success	Page 18 Director of Curriculum and Learner Success needs changed to Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships)	June 2023
4.0	Learner Success	Fitness to Study section extended to reference Professional suitability and Fitness to practice and associated Standard Operating Procedure.	27/02/2024
4.0	Learner Success	Section 6.5 extended to include guidance from NI Muslim Family Association.	12/03/2024
5.0	Head of Learner Success	Clear guidance added on the use of appropriate register marks for lateness; COVID-19 guidance removed	02/06/2025

Table setting out the version history of this Policy - what changes were made, when and by whom

Distribution

This document has been distributed as follows:

Name	Date
Trade Union	N/A
Strategic Leadership Team	25 October 2021
Committee	24 September 2019
Governing Body	N/A
Published on intranet by Corporate Development	Sept 2019; Sept 2020; Nov 2021; June 2023; May 2024; June 2025

Table setting out who approved the Policy and when

Contents

Page

1. Introduction	5
2. Policy Aims	5
3. Scope and Objectives of the Policy	5
4. Principles	5
A. Attendance	7
5. Standard	7
6. Students' responsibility to attain this standard	7
7. Authorised (Planned) and Unauthorised Absences	8
8. Actions a student should take if they are absent	8
9. College Responsibilities to help students to attain this standard	10
B. Punctuality	12
10. Standard	12
11. Responsibilities of students to attain this standard	12
12. Responsibilities of the College to help students to attain this standard	12
13. International Students	13
14. Fitness to Study	14
15. Summary of the Attendance and Punctuality Policy	15
16. Complaints	15
17. Monitoring	16
18. Review	16
APPENDIX 1 - Authorised (Planned) and Unauthorised Absences	17
APPENDIX 2 - Student Disciplinary and Student Support Interventions for student attendance/punctuality causes for concern	18

1. Introduction

Belfast Metropolitan College expects all students to attend College on a consistent and punctual basis. Regular and punctual attendance are qualities expected by employers, so the College seeks to develop these qualities in all its students.

2. Policy Aims

- 2.1 This policy aims to ensure that all students understand College attendance requirements and to provide a consistent approach to student attendance in all areas of the College.
- 2.2 The policy aims to promote full and punctual attendance at programmed sessions, including tutorials, Essential Skills and enrichment modules, where applicable.
- 2.3 Reasonable adjustments may be made to attendance requirements, based on medical evidence or proof of extenuating circumstances provided by the student.

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 If 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 aims.

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 regard 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 a 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 or attendance at College, unless the student gives their express permission for this to happen. Similarly, information on a student's progress or attendance can only be released to an employer/supporting organisation which pays the student's fees or facilitates day-release arrangements, if the student has given their consent for this to happen. The student has the right to withdraw that consent at any time.

A. Attendance

5. Standard

Full attendance is expected for all classes and timetabled activities.

6. Students' responsibility to attain this standard

- 6.1 Students enrol to undertake an agreed programme of study. Student attendance at lessons is central to successful completion of their course(s). 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 may 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. In the long term, they may risk not achieving the grades/qualifications that they need to progress in their studies and/or employment.
- 6.4 For that reason, any student who misses more than 15 minutes of a lesson should be marked 'Late'; students who miss 50% or more of a lesson should be marked 'Absent'.
- 6.5 The College understands that students and their family circles may occasionally 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 close family bereavement. Notification of absences should be made to designated staff members who may require the student to produce supporting evidence. .
- 6.6 Belfast Met supports students from a wide variety of faiths and none. The College provides a number of Faith Rooms for students to take time out to reflect and/or pray outside of class time. Whilst the College will always seek to accommodate student needs, religious observance should only take place outside of class time and in the designated areas.

7. Authorised (Planned) and Unauthorised Absences

- 7.1 Absences 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 appropriate staff.
- 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 accepts it as 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 or parent/guardian has contacted the College with viable reason for absence, as detailed in Appendix 1
UA	Unauthorised Absence	No contact has been made, or the reason is not accepted as authorised, or the student has attended less than 50% of the class
L	Late	The student arrived more than 15 minutes late but attended more than 50% of the class.
S	Sickness	See 8.1, 8.2 or 8.3 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
Z	Authorised Absence – College Exception	Exceptional closure e.g., due to adverse weather conditions

Table of Student Marking Options

If the reason for absence is not listed in the table above, the student will be marked UA - Unauthorised Absence, by default.

8.1 Absence due to illness – Further or Higher Education Students

If a student needs to stay at home because of illness, the student should notify the College in line with the 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 any absence of more than 5 days.

8.2 Absence due to illness - Training Programme Students
Please refer to bespoke process documentation.

8.3 Absence Due To Illness - ApprenticeshipsNI and Higher Level Apprenticeships

Regular attendance is essential for the successful achievement of the qualifications listed in the training framework. In accordance with Department for the Economy requirements, 'Any participant who has not attended the training element of their ApprenticeshipsNI/HLA 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 students complete and sign any directed training records issued by college staff to demonstrate attendance in line with the attendance arrangements set out in the PTP agreement. Students will also have attendance arrangements laid out by the employer in the terms and conditions of the employment contract. Students should advise the designated college staff contact in advance of any holidays /special leave or work commitments that might affect their attendance and progress on the course.

8.4 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.

8.5 Absence due to an appointment

If a student needs to leave College during timetabled classes because they have an appointment, they must inform the 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.

8.6 Absence due to an accident whilst in College

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

8.7 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 provide an acceptable reason will lead to non-payment.

8.8 Absence during the College day

The College reserves the right to contact any student who is absent from timetabled lessons in any part of the day.

8.9 **Authorised or unauthorised absence**

If the College decides that a student's reason for being absent 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.

8.10 **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
- giving explanations which are inconsistent or of a nature which gives cause for concern
- a pattern of missing particular days or particular classes
- attendance is 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
 - Student may be refused progression to the next academic year
 - Student may be refused restart requests to the same programme of study
 - Student may be refused restart requests 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 the student got their student visa using a CAS from Belfast Met, their sponsor will report them:
- if they fail to enrol on their course within the enrolment period;
 - if they miss 10 expected contacts without their educational sponsor's permission;
 - if their sponsor stops being their sponsor for any other reason, for example, if the student moves into an immigration category that does not need a student visa sponsor;
 - if there are any significant changes in their circumstances, for example, if the length of a course of study becomes shorter;
 - if there are any suspicions that they are breaking the conditions of their 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 where 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 GP 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; 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.

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 2026.

APPENDIX 1 - Authorised (Planned) and Unauthorised Absences

The guidance on suitable acceptable reasons for authorised absence below corresponds to current EMA guidance.

1. The following would be considered suitable reasons for an authorised absence:

- Educational visits/University open days/career-related interviews/representing the College at an event/College meeting.
- Attendance at the funeral or wedding or civil ceremony of a close family member
- Attendance at a probation meeting/court appearance/meeting with social worker, home office or police
- Delayed or cancelled public transport that leaves the student with no method of travelling to college .
- A driving test (not lessons)
- Genuine family emergencies Exceptional extra-curricular activities such as representative sport at national, regional or county level
- Medical/Dental appointments which could not be foreseen or could not be made outside College hours (evidence must be provided)External Examination (evidence must be provided)

2. 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).

3. Illnesses may also be considered authorised absence. However:

- After 5 days, all students must produce a medical certificate.
- A student who has had more than 3 instances of short-term absence due to illness without producing evidence may be subject to the Student Disciplinary Policy.
- Care must be taken to monitor patterns of requests for authorised absence as these in themselves may constitute “at risk” behaviour.

- Students on a training programme must follow the stipulated absence process.

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
<p>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.</p>	<p>Alongside the systematic application of the student disciplinary policy, the following student support interventions should be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 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
<p>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.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>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).</p>	

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

