

## AUTHORISED AND UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE GUIDANCE

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### General principles

In deciding whether an absence should be authorised or not, the college should take account of three general principles:

- The presumption is that any absence should be considered to be *unauthorised*, unless there is a valid reason otherwise. In other words, where there is an absence there is no requirement for the college proactively to justify its decision not to authorise the absence;
- If the claimed reason for absence could have been foreseen, then the student should have applied for authorised absence in advance. So, for example, it might be acceptable for a student of the Jewish faith to have authorised absence on Yom Kippur if this was applied for in advance; but it would not be acceptable to miss classes without prior notification and then to claim that the absence should be authorised;
- Where the claimed reason for absence could not reasonably have been foreseen, the college should consider whether the absence was really unavoidable. An absence which could not have been notified in advance should be notified to the college on the day in question; unless, exceptionally, there is a good reason why this could not be done, the absence should not be authorised without such notification.

In operating these principles, the college should ensure that decision making processes are transparent, and that there is equitable application of rules across all the students receiving attendance based financial support.

### Absences which can be foreseen in advance

Absences should only be authorised in advance if the reason given for the absence is a good one. The following are examples of reasons for absence which would tend to be acceptable:

- **Hospital/Orthodontic Appointment or Admission:** which cannot be arranged outside college hours and supported by an appointments card (a copy should be kept on file). This option should also be used in a medical emergency situation.
- **Emergency Care Responsibility:** a need in an emergency situation to look after a family member or another person for whom the student has caring responsibilities, although, the college should not regularly be authorising absences for a student for this reason. Where such responsibilities are regularly interrupting attendance there is a need to explore solutions personally with the student.
- **Religious Holiday:** where the student belongs to that religion.
- **University Visit or Career-related Interview:** either to attend an open day or for interview; or a career related interview.
- **Job Interview:** for progression/career related
- **Funeral/Death:** attending the death or funeral of a relative or close friend.
- **Transport:** severe disruption to a student's mode of transport (ie buses not running in bad weather). However, unless the student has a disability we expect distances of under 2 miles to be covered on foot.
- **Driving Test:** a practical driving test NOT driving lessons or theory test.
- **Planned Optional AS/A2 Revision Sessions:** where optional revision sessions have been timetabled for AS/A2 students but they fail to attend, the students should be marked as authorised.
- **Exam:** if a student is taking an exam within the College.
- **Benefits Appointment:** if a student is required to attend an appointment at the Job Centre Plus.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and clearly decision makers will want to take account of: the inherent reasonableness of any case; the number of absences taken by any one individual; repetitions of the same excuse; and whether the excuse is backed up with evidence.

The following reasons for absence are *not* acceptable:

- (a) Holidays;
- (b) Part or full time work which is not part of the student's programme of study;
- (c) Leisure activities;
- (d) Birthdays or similar celebrations;
- (e) Babysitting younger siblings;
- (f) Shopping;
- (g) Driving lessons;
- (h) Sickness

This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

### **Absences which cannot be foreseen in advance**

Where an absence genuinely could not be foreseen in advance, the student should nevertheless make arrangements to tell the school or college as soon as possible on the day in question that they will be missing classes. Where a student has failed to do this, the absence should be treated as unauthorised, and therefore the student should not receive any attendance based financial support for the week in question.

The only exception is where the young person can supply a strong reason why they failed to contact the college. This might be because an event has been particularly disturbing or unpleasant, or because there has been a genuine practical barrier.

The following are examples of reasons for absence which would tend to be acceptable, provided that the college has been notified on the day:

- An emergency situation involving a family member or another person for whom the student has caring responsibilities. Sudden severe illness would be an example. However, while such cases should be treated sympathetically on a one-off-basis, they should not be acceptable as regular grounds for authorising absence;
- Transport problems, where these were not known about in advance, and where there is no alternative means to hand. It may be reasonable to expect students to walk 2 miles if they do not have a relevant disability.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

### **“Second chances”**

It is inevitable that there will be situations where there is doubt that a student is telling the truth, but there is no proof. An example might be where a student fails to phone in having allegedly woken up sick, but claims that the household telephone was out of order. Where something of this nature happens for the first time in a student's career, it can be acceptable for the college to accept the excuse, but to make clear that this is the only occasion on which a dubious excuse will be accepted.

### **General authorisations**

The College may find it helpful to issue a general authorisation of absence in some circumstances – for example, severe weather.

### **Guidance in respect of attendance-based financial payments**

In general, a student should be paid only where they have attended all the sessions for which they are required to register for these payments. If the student has failed to attend, then the student should receive no payment for that week, and the College should notify appropriately in its weekly return.

It is, however, acceptable for the College to deem absence to be authorised. Where an absence is authorised, the student will still be entitled to the weekly payment as though he/she has attended in full (unless, of course, they have an unauthorised absence for a different session).

The fundamental principle is that, based on government guidelines, the College decides whether a particular absence is to be authorised or not.

## Sickness

In general payment will be stopped for sickness. However students may be allowed up to two days per term supported by a doctor's note or self-certification form signed by themselves and verified by their Student Mentor.

## Partial attendance

For attendance based financial payment purposes the key point is that the college needs to report whether there has been satisfactory attendance; and the college is free to determine the basis for taking that decision. Where a student has not registered for an individual lesson, or arrives late, this should be picked up at the register taken for that lesson, but this may not immediately be detected for payment purposes. The College should ensure that where staff are reporting absence from a lesson, there are arrangements for drawing this to the attention of the Student Mentor or Student Finance Officer.

## Study leave

Students should receive their weekly payment during periods of authorised study leave preceding examinations until they have sat their final examination.

## Pay – No Pay Decisions

- i. The Student Finance Officer will make the decision on whether or not to pay a student for a particular week based on the above guidance.
- ii. If a student is not satisfied they should appeal to the Student Finance Officer.
- iii. If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the Student Finance Officer, they should appeal to the Assistant Principal: HR & Student Services whose decision will be final.

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