

Authorised Absence Policy

September 2020

Aims

The University is committed to providing an excellent student experience by facilitating a supportive and collaborative learning environment, with all students actively engaging in their learning. Attendance and Engagement is a key aspect of this however the University is aware there may be exceptional reasons why a student is unable to attend classes, or engage with their studies.

The purpose of the Authorised Absence Policy (the Policy) is to form part of the Student Engagement and Participation Policy and to offer support to students where they may be unable to fully engage with their studies.

This policy applies to all students studying at the University, including those on placement or studying abroad, and aims to provide guidance to students and staff in relation to authorised absence.

Finally, the policy enables the University to support international students in meeting the engagement requirement of their study visa while ensuring it remains compliant with Home Office sponsor guidance.

Authorised Absence Process

The University expects students to attend all of their timetabled teaching sessions and to engage with all research related activities, unless there is an exceptional circumstance that has been authorised by either the relevant School or the Student Visa Compliance team.

Where a student is unable to attend timetabled teaching sessions, or engage with research activities, they will need to request authorised absence via the Student Absence System as soon as practicable. The system can also be accessed via Blackboard. In cases where a student is unable to submit a request via the system the relevant School or Student Visa Compliance team should submit the request on their behalf. For audit purposes, all requests must be recorded through the system.

Authorised absence can be requested in the following circumstances

- i) For taught students who will miss a timetabled session(s) or are unable to engage with online learning
- ii) For postgraduate students during their thesis stage
- iii) For postgraduate research students throughout the year (with the exception of periods of approved annual leave)

Authorised absence cannot be requested in the following circumstances

- i) Authorised absence cannot be used in relation to the non-submission of work
- ii) Authorised absence does not need to be requested during official vacation periods (including approved annual leave for postgraduate research students)

Where an absence request is approved, the period of absence will be removed from a student's attendance profile and will not affect a student's overall attendance percentage. If the University rejects the absence request this will be considered as an 'informed absence'. Informed absences will be considered as unauthorised absence and will be marked against a student's attendance percentage.

Where a student submits an authorised absence request in advance and subsequently attends the session, the absence will automatically be amended from either informed or authorised absence to 'attended'.

The staff member assessing the absence request must adhere to this policy and consider the reasoning (in line with Appendix 1), the evidence provided, the length of absence requested and whether the period of absence will adversely affect the student's progress. In some cases, the staff member assessing the request may need to seek endorsement from a relevant academic member of staff regarding whether the period requested would affect a student's progress.

Where a student holds a student sponsored visa, the decision on the request will be made by the Student Visa Compliance team and the system will direct these requests automatically. In these cases, all decisions will be made in conjunction with Home Office guidance that will be effective in addition to this policy.

Consideration of Absence Requests

Depending on the type of absence requested, the decision of an absence request could automatically be made by the Student Attendance System or by a member of staff. Staff and students should refer to Appendix 1: Reasons for Absence for details regarding how different categories of request will be decided upon.

System Authorisation

Where a student requests an absence of 5 days or less due to illness, the absence will be automatically considered as authorised and as a self-certified absence without the need to provide a medical note.

For an absence to be authorised in this way, the request must not result in a student having 5 days of self-certified illness in the last 30 days. Where the request would lead to the student exceeding this limit they will be advised to request the absence under the 'other' category to enable a member of staff to assess the request and request supporting evidence. Where this is not available the absence will be marked as informed absence.

Evidence

All evidence will be assessed to ensure that it is date relevant and fully supports the reason for absence. Where evidence does not cover the full period that has been requested, a part authorisation may be given.

All evidence must meet the requirements as laid out in Appendix 1: Reasons for Absence.

Time limits

In considering whether to authorise absence, a student's ability to submit assessments, sit examinations and progress should be considered. When considering a prolonged period of absence,

academic endorsement should be sought to consider how the period of absence could affect a student's ability to progress on the programme. In cases where the absence would adversely impact on a student's progression, an interruption of study should be considered as an alternative.

For students that hold a Student Visa, additional Home Office guidance regarding the length of absence will be considered. Where a period of absence exceeds any Home Office limit an interruption of study should be considered.

Tuition Fees and End Dates

Students granted authorised absence will not be eligible for a refund of tuition fees, nor will their expected end date of studies be amended to reflect the period of absence.

Student Visa Holders

Where a student holds a Student visa, all absence requests will be considered by a member of the Student Visa Compliance Team.

All requests will be assessed in conjunction with Home Office rules to ensure students continue to comply with their visa conditions and that the University abides by its duties as a student sponsor licence holder.

An absence request will only be approved where it meets the conditions of this policy and the period of absence will not affect a student's ability to complete their course within their visa expiry date. In addition, any request made that exceeds 60 calendar days will be declined, in line with Home Office rules, and an interruption of study must be considered as an alternative.

All absence requests and supporting evidence will be held for one calendar year from either the date a student leaves the University or from the visa expiry date, whichever is the earliest.

Covid-19 Temporary Measures

For the 20/21 academic year, a blended approach to teaching will be delivered which will combine digital resources, interactions, collaborations and activities alongside face to face learning. The Student Attendance System will monitor and record attendance at face to face to sessions and therefore students should request absence, via the system, where they will be absent from face to face classes.

Whilst it will not be marked against a student's attendance record, where a student is unable to engage with online learning, they should still complete an authorised absence request to ensure that support and advice can be given.

The system has been amended for the 20/21 academic year to include Covid-19 related absence reasons which can be found in Appendix 1: Reasons for Absence.

Appendix 1 – Reasons for Absence

Reason for Absence	Description	Evidence Required	Authorised or Informed
Illness (5 days or less)	To be used for cases of illness that last 5 working days or less	In most cases evidence will not be required. If a student has had more than 5 days of absence under this category, in a period of 30, evidence may be requested.	Authorised
Illness (6 days or more)	To be used for longer period of illness that last more 6 days or more	Under this category a medical note must be provided*	Authorised
Doctors/Medical note	To be used for an appointment with a registered* doctor, healthcare professional or dentist	Evidence of the appointment including the time and date must be provided*	Authorised
Bereavement	To be used if a close family member passes away. For example, a spouse, parent, grandparent, guardian, sibling, son or daughter	Official medical certification or a death certificate*	Authorised
Commute Issues	To be used where an absence has occurred as a result of travel delays	Not required	Informed Absence
Holiday	To be used for a holiday related absence	Not required	Informed Absence
Covid-19 Related Absences			
Self-isolation – Following overseas travel	To be used after travelling to the UK where there is a self-isolation requirement in place at the time of arrival	Flight tickets showing the date of travel and place of departure. Authorisation will also be dependent upon the reason for travel	Authorised – from face to face classes only
Self -isolation	To be used in cases where self-isolation is required. This could be due to an individual or a member of their household having Covid-19 symptoms, or	Where applicable, evidence of any track and trace communication	Authorised – from face to face classes only

	receiving a track and trace notification		
Shielding	To be used in line with government advice where a medical condition may mean an individual is clinically extremely vulnerable to Covid-19	Documentation confirming the requirement to shield E.g. from a G.P or Hospital Clinician	Authorised – from face to face classes only
Other – including but not limited to			
Maternity/Paternity leave	To be used for a period maternity or paternity leave away from studies	Birth certificate or official medical certificate	Authorised
Own wedding ceremony	To be used for an individual's own wedding ceremony	Marriage certificate required, including travel documentation (if applicable)	Authorised
Attendance at family celebratory events	For example, a family member's wedding or graduation ceremony	Not required	Informed Absence
Involvement in a significant/prestigious event	To be used for events such as attending a conference to present a paper or at the request of a financial sponsor	Letter of invitation from the relevant organising body	Authorised
Critical or life-threatening illness of a close family member	To be used where an individual may need to visit a close family member. For example, a spouse, parent, grandparent, guardian, sibling, son or daughter	Official medical certification*	Authorised
Domestic or personal disruptions	For example, moving house	Not required	Informed Absence
Employment related issues	For example, a work shift conflicting with a timetabled session	Not required	Informed Absence
Cultural reasons	For example, to attend a cultural event	Not required	Informed Absence
Visa Extension	To be used to attend an appointment with the UKVI as part of a visa application	Evidence a visa application has been submitted and evidence of the appointment	Authorised

Please note that this is a non-exhaustive list

*Acceptable supporting evidence

Below are the requirements that any supporting evidence must meet to be considered to support an absence request:

- i) All evidence submitted must be in English. Evidence that is not in English must be translated by a certified translator
- ii) Any medical evidence provided must be signed by a registered doctor, healthcare professional or dentist and they must be registered with the relevant professional body (GMC, NMC etc.). Appointments with a complementary practitioner will not be accepted
- iii) Evidence in the form of photographs or x-rays will not be accepted, where the request is illness-related
- iv) All evidence must be date relevant to the absence being requested
- v) Where satisfactory evidence is provided, the absence request will also be considered in conjunction with the length of time being requested. Where the length of absence would affect a student's ability to progress or successfully complete, and interruption of study should be considered.