

## UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

### POLICY AND PROCEDURES ON STUDENT ABSENCE

This Policy and Procedures on Student Absence was originally approved by Senate on 20 September 2023, with the most recent revisions being approved on 5 June 2024. It applies to all undergraduate and postgraduate taught students.

The University places a high value on the health and wellbeing of its students. The University is keen to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to maximise the welfare of students but also to limit the consequences for students when genuine absences do occur.

#### 1. POLICY ON STUDENT ATTENDANCE

- 1.1 The University expects that students will normally attend all classes, whether these are on-campus or online<sup>1</sup>, and, in cases of work placements, meet all attendance requirements. Some teaching sessions (e.g., tutorials, seminars, and laboratories) are compulsory. Course documentation will make clear attendance requirements.
- 1.2 Students are required to undertake all assessments (including examinations) and to submit all pieces of in-course assessment by the required deadline.
- 1.3 The University Senate may terminate the studies of any student who persistently fails to attend, or perform the required work of, the course for which they are registered without medical or other good cause for doing so. The University's [student monitoring webpages](#) provide more information on how attendance and the submission of coursework is monitored. Students should note that failure to report an absence (see 1.4) may trigger their School's monitoring procedures for student attendance.
- 1.4 Students must report an absence (defined as an inability to attend or perform required work) in the following instances:
  - (i) They are absent for any period of more than seven consecutive days<sup>2</sup>;
  - (ii) They are absent for a period of less than seven consecutive days but during this time they:
    - a. fail to undertake a piece of required assessment (including invigilated examinations or in-course assessment) or submit by the required deadline;
    - b. are unable to attend a compulsory teaching session (e.g., tutorial, laboratory, or seminar) or a clinical/work placement.
- 1.5 If a student sits an exam or submits an assignment, it will be assumed that the student is fit to do so and there are no extenuating/mitigating circumstances (defined as exceptional, serious, acute and unforeseen problems, both medical and not). If a student believes that they are not fit to sit an exam or to submit an assignment due to an extenuating circumstance, or subsequently realises that they were not fit to do so, they should advise the School by completing the absence form at the first possible opportunity, in line with Section 2.1, and in any case before any results are published. Failure to follow this may undermine any future appeal.
- 1.6 Notwithstanding Section 1.5, this policy is distinct from the Policy and Procedures on Extensions and Penalties for Unauthorised Late submissions of Coursework. Notifying an absence does not necessarily justify the absence and will not automatically authorise an extension.
- 1.7 Students should be aware that, although an absence may be considered justifiable, they must be able to demonstrate that they meet all the intended learning outcomes of a course before a pass can be awarded. Students who fail to demonstrate they meet the intended learning outcomes of a course, even where evidence

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<sup>1</sup> Students who are involved in High Performance Sports and are seeking to apply for academic flexibility should refer to the [Policy and Procedures on Academic Flexibility](#).

<sup>2</sup> Seven consecutive days includes weekends (for example Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday).

supporting the absence exists, will not be eligible to receive a class certificate. Details of the learning outcomes for each course will be provided in the relevant course documentation.

- 1.8 Student visa holders should be aware that periods of extended absence may have an impact on the University's ability to continue sponsoring their Student visa. The University is only permitted to continue sponsoring a student's visa during a period of absence if the student is still able to achieve their overall degree intention upon their return to study. Students should refer to the [Immigration and Student Visas webpage](#), or contact the Student Immigration Compliance Team for advice.

## 2. PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING AN ABSENCE

### 2.1 When should an absence be reported?

- 2.1.1 Absence should be reported as far as possible in advance where the absence is planned (e.g., funeral or representing the University in an official event). Where advance notification is not possible (e.g., in event of illness), it is **expected that students will inform the University on the first day of any period of absence**.
- 2.1.2 Where it is impossible for a student to report on the first day of absence, students should report at the first possible opportunity (normally no later than 3 days after the first day of any period of absence) and provide an explanation of the reasons which prevented them notifying their absence earlier. Late notification of absence without good cause will only be permissible in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.1.3 In cases in which a student becomes ill during an invigilated examination and is unable to continue, they must alert the invigilator, who will record this in line with the [Rules for the Conduct of Prescribed Assessments and written Examinations for Degrees or Diplomas](#), Section 3.16. They should then advise the School by completing the absence form at the first possible opportunity, normally within three days. In cases in which a student becomes ill during a timed in-course assessment, the student should follow the procedure outlined in section 1.5.

### 2.2 How should an absence be reported?

- 2.2.1 A student should report an absence through the Student Report and Request Tool in [Student Hub](#) or, where a student is unable to access the Student Hub, the absence should be reported directly to the School (or each of the Schools, when the absence impacts more than one course) concerned. In some instances, an alternative tool may be used. Where this is the case, students should follow the procedures outlined in the course documentation<sup>3</sup>. When a student is on a clinical/work placement they should follow the procedures for reporting absence outlined in the course documentation. Any required supporting evidence should be included when reporting the absence.

### 2.3 When is supporting evidence required?

- 2.3.1 The requirement for submitting supporting evidence with an absence report varies depending on the period of absence, the nature of the absence, the nature of the events missed and the programme year of the student. Students should, however, note that notification of an absence will not necessarily justify the absence and a clear explanation of the reasons for the absence should be given.
- 2.3.2 Supporting evidence is required in the following scenarios:

- (a) Where a student in UG programme years 1 and 2 has been absent for more than seven consecutive days<sup>4</sup>;
- (b) Where a student in UG programme years 3-5 and in PGT programmes:

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<sup>3</sup> Medical, dental and physician associate students should report absence via their VLEs (MyMBChB, MyBDS and MyPA). Students studying at the Qatar campus should follow the instructions on the course documentation.

<sup>4</sup> Seven consecutive days includes weekends (for example Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.)

- (i) has been absent for more than seven consecutive days;
- (ii) has been absent for less than seven consecutive days and has been unable:
  - a. to undertake a piece of required assessment (including invigilated examinations or in-course assessment) or to submit by the required deadline;
  - b. to attend a compulsory teaching session.

2.3.3 Supporting evidence is not usually required where a student in UG programme years 1 and 2 has been absent for less than seven consecutive days, even if they have been unable to undertake a required assessment, submit an assessment by the required deadline, or attend a compulsory teaching session.

2.3.4 Notwithstanding Section 2.3.3, monitoring procedures for student attendance and late submission of coursework penalties still apply, as well as external bodies' regulatory requirements, including Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), funding bodies, or the UK Visas and Immigration department (UKVI) of the Home Office (see Section 2.4.5).

2.3.5 Schools have discretion on whether or not evidence is required for specific cases. For example, in certain situations (such as, but not limited to, very sensitive or traumatic circumstances) it may be inappropriate or difficult to provide independent evidence for an absence. Students are advised to seek the appropriate support when needed (see Section 2.6 for details).

2.3.6 Students with inclusion adjustments approved by Student Support or by Occupational Health may not need to provide evidence for absences that affect their attendance at compulsory teaching sessions. However, monitoring of student attendance and late submission of coursework penalties may still apply.

## 2.4 What is considered supporting evidence?

2.4.1 For medical absences, appropriate supporting evidence may include (this is not an-exhaustive list):

- i. Written evidence from a clinical practitioner<sup>5</sup> (which may include pro-forma or a letter) who has been providing health assessment/care for the student which must be signed and clearly show the clinician's details, to enable verification. This can include written evidence from a secondary (e.g., hospital clinic, specialist doctor), tertiary (e.g., highly specialised national or regional centre) or community care service, or a private surgery/clinic, etc. In case of illness, students should refer to the [Know Who To Turn To](#) and [Pharmacy First](#) guidance for advice on which service they should use. If it is impossible for the clinician to verify subsequently that the student had been ill on the date of absence, a back-dated form of evidence will not normally be accepted.
- ii. A letter/email from a support service (including services within the University, e.g. Student Advice & Support Team or University Counselling Service, but also an external counsellor) if they have an ongoing relationship with the student and are already aware of the student's circumstances prior to the absence taking place or have had contact with the student while they were experiencing the illness (i.e. retrospective evidence will not normally be accepted). In these cases, the support service practitioner should provide a letter or email outlining the nature of the medical issue, how it has impacted on the ability of the student to attend a compulsory teaching session or submit an assessment (if relevant) and the nature/extent of the support being given.
- iii. A detailed explanation, included in the absence form, from the student describing the impact that the illness has had on their ability to attend a compulsory teaching session or prepare for an assessment and/or undertake the assessment, if relevant.

2.4.2 For non-medical absences<sup>6</sup>, appropriate supporting evidence may include (this is not an exhaustive list):

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<sup>5</sup> Students should note that, in accordance with guidance from the Scottish Executive Health Department, clinical practitioners may charge a fee for the provision of medical certificates. Students should note that the University will not reimburse any costs incurred. Some clinical practitioners may not be able to supply medical certificates other than for employment reasons. In these cases, students may use an alternative form of evidence if needed.

<sup>6</sup> Students should not request a medical certificate from a clinical practitioner to cover absences of a non-medical nature.

- i. A letter/email from a support service (including services within the University, e.g. Student Advice & Support Team or University Counselling Service, but also an external counsellor or other services) detailing how the student's circumstances affected their studies and the nature/extent of the support being given.
- ii. A full description of the cause including the impact that it has had on their ability to attend a compulsory teaching session or prepare for an assessment and/or undertake the assessment, if relevant.
- iii. Other evidence acknowledged by the University to be of a significant nature, such as a police report, notification of a death, etc.

2.4.3 The Student Advice & Support Team can provide students with support in reporting their absences and, with the students' permission, can liaise with School(s) on their behalf<sup>7</sup>. Where a student believes their medical condition or personal circumstance to be of a particularly sensitive nature, or where the Team is already aware of a student's specific circumstances, students are encouraged to contact the Student Advice & Support Team directly. The University recognises that, for very personal or private issues/events, students may be reluctant to disclose the information to their School. In some cases, it may be possible for the Student Advice & Support Team to confirm to School(s) that they have sight of the relevant personal information and that the evidence is satisfactory.

2.4.4 Where appropriate, documentation submitted as supporting evidence should be in English. Any documentation not in English must be translated into English and verified.

2.4.5 Schools will decide on whether the evidence is satisfactory but may request additional information if required. In making this decision, Schools may refer to previous absences and School monitoring procedures for student attendance. Specific requirements by external bodies, including Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), funding bodies, or the UK Visas and Immigration department (UKVI) of the Home Office, will also need to be considered by the School. Students should note that, as per Section 1.6, submitting an absence report does not necessarily authorise an absence and this procedure is separate from an extension request.

## 2.5 What happens to reports of absence?

2.5.1 Reports of absence may be used:

- By Course Coordinators and/or Heads of School to suggest any remedial work the student should do on return to study. It is the responsibility of the student to ask the appropriate member of staff about any required remedial work. Students should note that, depending on the period of absence and work missed, it may not be possible for a student to make up the missed work and as such a student may not be eligible to receive their class certificate on account of their absence (see 1.7).
- By the Examiners in deciding whether to award an 'MC' (medical absence), 'GC' (good cause) or 'SC' (Self-certificate) for the course.

2.5.2 In cases of serious issues (e.g. when there is concern for a student's welfare) Schools may need to share reports of absence with the other University services, to ensure the student receives appropriate support. In cases where students are struggling with health issues, Schools and other staff should refer to the processes outlined in the [Support for Study Policy](#).

2.5.3 Reports of absence are not the same as extension requests and do not provide by themselves a justification for late submissions of coursework (see 1.6).

## 2.6 What support is available?

2.6.1 The University understands that students may need support and guidance as they deal with issues leading to

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<sup>7</sup> In certain circumstances, it may also be appropriate for a personal tutor (or equivalent) to liaise with a School on a student's behalf. Such circumstances can include instances where a student has been in regular contact with a personal tutor (or equivalent) over a period of time such that the student's personal circumstances are well-known to the personal tutor.

periods of absence. The University has a range of support services available to support students, as detailed below:

- The [Student Advice & Support Team](mailto:student.support@abdn.ac.uk) ([student.support@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:student.support@abdn.ac.uk)) offers impartial and confidential advice and support on a range of issues, including finance, disability information and more.
- The [Counselling Service](mailto:counselling@abdn.ac.uk) ([counselling@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:counselling@abdn.ac.uk)) is open to all students of the University.
- The [Multi-faith Chaplaincy](mailto:chaplaincy@abdn.ac.uk) ([chaplaincy@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:chaplaincy@abdn.ac.uk)) is a place of welcome for all and serves as a spiritual and social centre for students and staff.
- Schools can provide academic guidance for their students and can also be contacted for advice on available support. Relevant school contacts include the School admin office, Course Coordinators, lecturers or tutors.
- The Students' Union (AUSA) ([ausa@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:ausa@abdn.ac.uk)) represents and serves students' interests and works to make their time in Aberdeen as happy and enjoyable as possible.
- Students' Union Advice (SU Advice) ([ausaadvice@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:ausaadvice@abdn.ac.uk)) offers independent and impartial advice, support, and advocacy for students going through academic appeals, complaints and misconduct allegations.
- The Personal Tutor, PGT Pastoral Support Leads or Regents can help direct students to the appropriate support service, as needed.
- [Registry Officers](#) can provide guidance to students who have concerns about their programme of study.
- The Student Immigration Compliance Team ([immigration@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:immigration@abdn.ac.uk)) can provide information and advice on Student visa responsibilities.
- A full list of Support and Wellbeing services offered at the University is available on the website (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/students/support/index.php>).