



Authorisation of Absences for Full-Time Students SOP

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Deputy Principal Curriculum

Summary of Contents

Full-time Further Education (FTFE), Higher Education (HE) and Training for Success (TfS) students may be in receipt of payments from DEL, FE Awards or the College in relation to their attendance. The various funding schemes allow for authorised absence. This SOP seeks to standardise the understanding of “authorised” absences for FT students

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Contents

1.0	CHANGE HISTORY	1
2.0	BACKGROUND.....	2
3.0	SCOPE	2
4.0	PROCEDURE	2
5.0	COMMUNICATION PLAN.....	4
6.0	REVIEW.....	4
	APPENDIX 1: DOCUMENT CHANGE HISTORY	6

1.0 Change History

Changes to this SOP are documented in Appendix 1 of this document. When reading electronic copies of this document, [you can click here to view the change history](#).

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Full-time Further Education (FTFE), Higher Education (HE), Skills For Life and Work (SfL&W) and Traineeship students may be in receipt of payments from DfE, FE Awards or the College in relation to their attendance. The various funding schemes allow for authorised absence i.e. Authorised Absence to be included in determining the overall attendance. This SOP seeks to standardise the understanding of “authorised” absences for FT students.

3.0 Scope

- 3.1 The SOP gives guidance to staff involved in the recording of student attendance via e-registers and those staff who process payments to students generated by e-registers and timesheets. It applies to all students attending FT Further Education, FT Higher Education, Skills For Life and Work and Traineeship programmes and provides guidance on student absence reporting procedures.

4.0 Procedure

4.1 Recording Student Absence

When considering the authorisation of absences, the College will consider the following five questions:

Q1 Was the absence reasonable?

Examples of what would be reasonable include, but this list is not exhaustive and is provided by way of examples that would be considered acceptable:

- Weather related factors that affect a large area of Northern Ireland
- Transport disruption caused by strikes; civil unrest, public events, service provider
- If the student is a main carer and care arrangements for a close family member have fallen through. However, this should not be a regular occurrence that would lead to attendance dropping below 80% attendance;
- Attendance at a funeral, wedding or civil ceremony of close family members;
- Driving & Theory tests (but not lessons unless part of a College course);
- Visit to university open days or career related interview;
- Extra-curricular activities such as sports participation at national or county level or voluntary work. The activity must represent a significant personal achievement/involvement. Representing SERC at a sports or skills competitions should be regarded as authorised absence;
- Attendance at probation meeting and court cases;
- Family breakdown or other family related matters that cause the student to be living in temporary accommodation;
- Illness
- Attendance at interviews for employment or Further Education;
- Attendance at interviews with the Department for the Economy/Social Security Agency/Jobs and Benefits Office/Careers Office;
- To take written examinations or external competitive assessments related to the professional and technical qualifications being pursued;
- Attendance arising from a Community Service Order as directed by a Court of Law;
- For domestic emergencies including immediate family bereavements;

- Attendance at annual training courses or camps. A participant who is a member of the Auxiliary or Reserve Forces and who is required to attend annual training courses or camps may be granted special leave for a maximum of 2 weeks per academic year;
- Attendance at hospital/doctor/dentist appointments; only in emergencies or where these cannot be arranged outside the hours of course participation;
- Attendance at regular hospital visits or health checks for participants with disabilities;
- Attendance at events directly associated with, Apprenticeships and Traineeship including Skills Competitions.

Q2 Was absence backed up by authentic evidence?

This should constitute dated and written evidence, such as from the student, a parent, GP or hospital and submitted on the student's return to College. Students aged 18 or over are not expected to provide parental notes to explain absences. All evidence should be retained by the lecturer for audit purposes and in the event of a Subject Access Request being received. Lecturers should ensure that absence evidence should be retained securely and in compliance with GDPR and the Data Protection Act (2018) as it likely that notes will include Special Category information. For EMA students the evidence must be retained for 7 years. The student will be marked as unauthorised absent until they provide acceptable written evidence i.e. dated and written evidence to the lecturer explaining their absence. An absence cannot be authorised as the result of a phone call.

Q3 Has the student had numerous absences prior to the current absence?

FTFE, HE, TFS and Traineeship students are expected to have a minimum attendance of 80% or above over the academic year. There are times where student attendance may dip below this figure i.e. in exceptional circumstances such as medical or social issues. Periodic absences that bring attendance below 80% should not be authorised absence.

Q4 Has the student used the same reason for authorised absence before?

A student who suffers a notified medical condition which repeatedly causes their absence from the course should have this documented by their GP or hospital.

Q5 Has the student made an effort to contact the College on the day of absence or as close to the commencement of absence as is practically possible?

Students should make reasonable efforts to contact the College when they are absent such as by phone call or email. However, the student still needs to provide written reasons for their absence on their return to College.

Q6 Where can a student avail of support if their attendance is affecting their studies?

Students should raise concerns they have as quickly as possible so that staff can direct them to the most appropriate form of support. Staff should also reach out to students who have not been attending to discuss the support services available to them. Students in need will be referred to the Learner Welfare Team where the issues raised will be dealt with confidentially and in a non-judgmental manner. Please see the HE Student Handbook for further guidance on support services available

Q7 What are the possible consequences of poor attendance?

HE students who wish to withdraw, can, in some cases, be offered a leave of absence. This will normally be for a minimum period of one semester and guarantees the student a place on the course if they return on the agreed date.

Any student who is absent without an agreed leave of absence for four weeks will be assumed to have withdrawn from their course. Students who withdraw will be charged tuition fees as per the Fees Policy (see Fees Policy).

Q8 Can a student appeal a decision to remove them from the programme due to attendance?

If a student is not satisfied with the quality of service provided by the College or College staff, they have the right to complain. Students can complete a complaints form (found at reception) or email complaints@serc.ac.uk.

- 4.2 The College has the right to turn down a request for “authorised absence” authorisation if it is suspected that the reason provided for the absence is not genuine. The lecturer should record why they do not consider the reason to be acceptable and retain on file. If the lecturer is in doubt about the reasons submitted, they should discuss this with the course coordinator in order to ensure that a consistent approach is taken by all members of the course team in recording authorised and unauthorised absence. Students who arrive at class and, in the view of the tutor, seek to leave class early without good reason, such as the examples given in 1 above, should be marked as ‘unauthorised absent’.
- 4.3 EMA is in place to assist with costs incurred whilst attending College and therefore does not support long term absences. Evidenced medical absences may be authorised for up to three weeks after which they should be assessed to see whether they should be categorised as long-term sickness. Students who are on maternity leave but are continuing to engage in remote study with a view to completing their course may be marked present (virtually) and are therefore eligible to receive EMA. Students who are on paternity leave may be marked as authorised absence for up to three weeks and are eligible to receive EMA. Evidence relating to all authorisation of absences must be collected and retained by the course team for the current academic year plus seven years.

5.0 Communication Plan

This Procedure will be uploaded to the College intranet and referred to in staff induction and training.

6.0 Review

This procedure will be reviewed annually, or when the need for change has been identified

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and used for the purpose of recording and managing absence. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of your contract. Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of recording and managing absence.

Further information on data protection and your rights are available on our website <https://www.serc.ac.uk/customer-privacy>

Authorisation of Absence Form

Student ID: _____

Student Name: _____

Course: _____

First Date of Absence: _____

Last Date of Absence: _____

Number of Days: _____

Nature of Absence: _____

Was supporting evidence submitted: Yes / No

Student's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Absence Authorised? Yes / No

If absence was not authorised please state reason:

Course Tutor Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 1: Document Change History

Version	Date	Change Detail
1.0	July 2023	Transferred to new Accessibility Template
2.0	Nov 2023	Removal of reference to the attendance mark for Sickness at 2.1 and 4.1
2.1	August 2024	Responsible Owner amended to "Deputy Principal Curriculum"
2.2	November 2025	4.1 addition of questions 6 – 8 Remove all references to Training for Success (TfS) Q1 Remove - Attendance at SERC Youth Health Clinic 6.0 - Next Review updated to "Annually"