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TITLE:

Authorisation of Absences for Full-Time Students SOP

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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Director of Curriculum and Information Services

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N/A

Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations Screening Information (Section 75):

Date Policy Screened – Sept 2016

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Full-time Further Education (FTFE), Higher Education (HE) and Training for Success (TfS) 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 to be included in determining the overall attendance. This SOP seeks to standardise the understanding of “authorised” absences for FT students.

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 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, Training for Success and Traineeship programmes and provides guidance on student absence reporting procedures.

3.0 Procedure

3.1 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;
- Work-placement which is an integral part of the course;
- 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 (see below);
- Attendance at interviews for employment or Further Education;
- Attendance at interviews with the Department for Employment and Learning/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 SERC Youth Health Clinic; and
- Attendance at events directly associated with Training for Success, 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. 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.

- 3.2 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’.
- 3.3 EMA cannot assist with long term sickness as EMA is paid to students to assist with the costs incurred by attending the College. EMA recommends that absences over 3 weeks in length should be reviewed as this may now be classified as a long term sickness and the student should be recorded as unauthorised absence. This may affect the payment of EMA. EMA does not permit payment to students on maternity leave. Students should be recorded as an ‘unauthorised absence’ while on maternity leave. Evidence of authorisation of Absences for EMA students must be retained for seven years.

4.0 Communication Plan

- 4.1 This SOP will be posted on Learning Engine on the staff intranet.

5.0 Review

- 5.1 This SOP will be reviewed biannually or sooner to reflect changes in legislation or circumstance.



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: _____