



**Buckinghamshire
College Group**

Attendance and Engagement Policy and Strategy 2021-22

Responsible Officer: Executive Director MIS and Planning
Date Reviewed: July 2021
Next Review Date: July 2022
Policy Available: Intranet / Cloud / Website
Authorised by: Executive and Corporation

1. Introduction

Good attendance is recognised as one of the major components of student success and the College expects that all students will aspire to have 100% attendance and punctuality. Attending and engaging with all lessons is an essential behaviour in preparing students of all ages for work. The key performance indicator for attendance across College is 92% and this must be the minimum target for all students.

2. Policy Aim

- To make clear the College's expectations for attendance and punctuality.
- To set out the expectations and process for reporting any absences to the College.
- To outline the key factors that may impact attendance at College, and ensure a College strategy exists, with associated impact measures, to address these.
- To outline the sanctions and/or support, which will be applied as a result of unacceptable attendance and/or punctuality.
- To define the process and expectation in the accurate completion of registers.
- To assert the responsibilities of staff and students in the effective implementation and assurance of the policy.
- To achieve the KPI of 92% overall attendance in 2021/22.

3. Expectations

Buckinghamshire College Group (BCG) expects all students to strive for 100% attendance to their timetabled lessons. Arriving before the lesson is due to start minimises disruption to classmates and Teacher, ensuring the student maximises their learning opportunity. It is a key employability skill that we expect all students to prioritise during their time at College.

Attendance is the responsibility of all staff. It is important that attendance expectations and processes are consistently reinforced by all staff. Students must be reminded regularly of the importance of attendance on the successful achievement of their qualification(s).

Where a student is genuinely unable to attend College, due to sickness, an urgent need to seek medical attention, or a family funeral, for example, we expect them to follow our processes to report this absence in a timely and courteous manner. This process is outlined to students as part of their induction programme at College. It is also available to read and download on BCG's Virtual Learning Environment (Cloud), student and parent handbooks, and is widely advertised around College campuses. Students, parent & guardians are required to use the Student Absence Form online notification on every day of absence to keep us informed of the reason and likely length of absence. This process is important because we have a duty of care to ensure our students' wellbeing, but also because this is a standard process in the workplace, and we seek to educate young people to be responsible employees when they go out to work. Curriculum Administrators will receive the notification and update the student registers (including all cross college provision) with an I (Informed Absence).

The only exception to this rule is students who are aged under 16, because we have a wider safeguarding duty to monitor these students. We adhere to the Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance and recognise the significance of absence from education in Safeguarding matters. Therefore, in the event that a student aged under 16 is unable to attend college, we require the parent or carer to ring their link Safeguarding Officer to report the absence, including the reason for absence and expected or likely duration.

4. Key Factors

It is widely acknowledged that many factors contribute to poor student attendance and engagement. The associated Attendance and Engagement Strategy provides a plan to secure improvements in these areas:

Factor	Response
Boredom/inertia	Inspired teaching and active learning strategies Breadth of opportunity and experience Smart timetabling
Transport	Mini-bus provision between campuses Online resources to supplement face to face delivery
Physical and mental health	Fitness and recreation opportunities Welfare and Safeguarding support Counselling provision
Confidence, self-esteem and aspiration	Well-designed and timetabled Career Coaching and Progression Well-designed Tutorial content Well-designed Induction content
Expectations	Effective monitoring Rewards and sanctions with links to the Student Disciplinary Policy/Student Positive Behaviour guidance.

Students who attend their timetabled lessons, and engage with learning, are more likely to succeed in their studies, and to make positive progression from College to their next destination.

Well-monitored attendance and engagement can also support students in improving physical and mental health and wellbeing, including self-esteem and confidence by providing an “early-warning system” for curriculum and support staff throughout the College,

4.1 Implementation

Effective Information, Advice and Guidance

Ensuring that the student is enrolled to the right course and level at the beginning of their programme is critical in maintaining expected attendance levels; students who are not enjoying their programme, or whom feel overwhelmed by volume or level of work will quickly stop attending. All applicants have access to IAG throughout the application process from our Admissions Advisers, Course Teachers, Curriculum Managers and any applicant may request an appointment with our qualified Careers Adviser. Advice relating to curriculum subjects, industry pathways, levels and routes into employment is available at all College Open Events, IAG and Enrol Now events, as well as at interviews and other assessment processes.

Poor attendance in the very early stages of a course is a key indicator that the course is not right, and early intervention is crucial.

Supporting decision-making

All Study Programme students have a ‘Right Choice Review’ with a member of curriculum or pastoral staff during their first few weeks in College. However, information, advice and guidance (IAG) is available to any student at any time, via the Admissions Team, the Careers and Progression Adviser or a member of curriculum staff. Specific processes (detailed in the 6 Week Strategy) are in place for those students who realise very early on, i.e. in the first or second week that they have enrolled to a programme that is not suitable for them.

In 2020 we have instigated a new approach to Tutorials, providing students with a Tutorial programme providing good quality tutorial content delivered by Course Leaders. The aim is to combine enhanced opportunity for relationship building between Course Leaders and students, together with a complementary, dedicated Career Coaching and Progression programme delivered by Careers Coaches. This has been implemented successfully and will continue for 2021-22.

For work based students it is essential that both students and employers understand the responsibility and commitment to attend all timetabled College learning and exams at the outset of the programme. It should be emphasised that attendance to functional skills lessons and achievement of the associated qualifications is a mandatory aspect of their programme and delivery of vocational aspects may be delayed until these are achieved, if deemed necessary.

Adequate Transport

The College recognises that its three campuses are set in very different locations, some of which are easier to access via public transport than the others. As such, it does make some arrangements to provide bus services to some outlying areas which are not adequately served by local public bus routes. Students are required to purchase a termly pass for these services via the College Online Store, on its website.

The College is committed to ensuring that accessibility and the cost of travelling to the College do not present a barrier to attendance or engagement in education for students. The College Support scheme can provide financial assistance for students who live more than 3 miles from College and meet the criteria outlined in the policy.

Smart Timetabling

The College expects that Curriculum Managers and Faculty Directors make every effort to ensure student timetables are considered and conducive to good attendance. For example, it is not expected that there are large gaps in the day, or days where students are expected to attend for only one lesson. Study Programme timetables should engage students for 3-4 days per week, containing a balance of vocational learning, practical learning, English, Maths and Digital Skills, Independent Study, Tutorial and Career Coaching and Progression to ensure variety and balance attendance across all aspects of the Study Programme. Students will be encouraged and supported to access work experience/industrial placement on Day 5.

The College manages timetabling in such a way as to ensure that centrally delivered subjects, such as English, Maths and Digital Skills, are prioritised in timetables so as to ensure the best fit for all timetables and courses.

Inspiring Teaching

High quality teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) is central to students' enjoyment and engagement with College and the College set out its expectations with regard to the standards of TLA clearly in its Teaching, Learning & Assessment Strategy. It is expected that teachers provide a 'consistently outstanding and inspirational learning experience for all students'. It is expected that students across all curriculum areas experience a balance of practical and vocational learning, external visits to workplaces and relevant other places of interest, e.g. museums, universities, as well as visitors to their class and opportunities to engage with their local community, for example via fundraising or community projects.

The College implements a robust system for observing and assessing the quality of TLA across all areas of provision and where it is considered that the standards of TLA do not meet College expectations a range of support is available for teachers, including Advanced Practitioner support, peer support and a continuous programme of professional development.

5. Monitoring

5.1 Register Marking

To enable effective monitoring of student attendance it is critical that registers are marked timely and accurately by the lecturer teaching the session as detailed below. Registers are a legal document and a funding requirement and as such are an auditable document for which we are required to keep accurate records:

- Registers should be marked in the first 15 minutes of the session wherever possible

- If it is not possible to mark the register in the sessions, registers must be marked by the end of the day
- Daily reports are sent to Curriculum Managers and Faculty Directors detailing any unmarked registers. These must be followed up with individual staff within 24 hours.

5.2 Standard Process - Study Programmes & Work-based Students

Course Leaders address every unauthorised absence personally with students. Course Leaders are responsible for monitoring and following up with student attendance for all parts of the Study Programme (vocational, CCP, Tutorial, English, maths and digital skills). If poor attendance continues then escalated to Curriculum Managers or Faculty Directors as detailed below. This process will restart and repeat each half term:

- **Students first informed or unauthorised absence**
 - Course leader to telephone student to discuss reason for absence and a record of discussion recorded on ProMonitor
 - Careers Coach completes a return to college interview with student which is uploaded to ProMonitor
 - Careers Coach arranges for student attendance to lunchtime Attendance Awareness session (if during first six weeks)
- **Students second informed or unauthorised absence**
 - Course leader to telephone parents (and employers if WBL) to discuss reason for absence and a record of discussion recorded on ProMonitor
 - Careers Coach completes a return to college interview with student which is uploaded to ProMonitor and advises safeguarding team of absence and/or potential concerns.
 - Careers Coach arranges for student attendance to lunchtime Attendance Awareness session (if during first six weeks)
- **Students third informed or unauthorised absence**
 - Course leader makes referral to Curriculum Manager.
 - Curriculum Manager to telephone parent (and employers if WBL) to discuss reason for absence and set targets and agree attendance action plan (notice to improve)
 - If attendance is specific to English and/or maths a joint meeting with the Head of English/maths should be arranged
 - A record of discussion and action plan recorded on ProMonitor. The notice to improve will be sent to students and parents by the curriculum administrator.
 - The course leader should monitor improvements over the next two weeks and update the Curriculum Manager.
- **Students further informed or unauthorised absence (first six weeks)**
 - If there is no improvement, Unsatisfactory Induction Period letter will be sent out. Course leaders to notify their Curriculum Manager and Curriculum Administrator who will send out the correspondence. A copy of the letter to be sent to parent/carer.
 - The Course Leader will be required to submit a student change request on ProSolution for a withdrawal.
 - The student will have 5 working days to appeal the decision to withdraw them from the course. Appeals need to be made in writing, stating their case, to the Faculty Director who will arrange a meeting within 5 working days with the Course Leader, student and parent/carer to discuss alternative provision.
 - Please note: For students who enrol later, their induction period will be completed six weeks after their start date.

- **Students further informed or unauthorised absence (after six weeks)**
 - The actions detailed in the Student Disciplinary Policy should be followed as detailed in Section 1.

5.3 Monitoring attendance for English and maths

It is recognised that some students may have good attendance for the vocational and tutorial element of their study programme but lower attendance for their English and/or maths qualifications. Student feedback has shown that attendance issues are more likely to be resolved where a prompt and joint intervention between the vocational and English and maths team is applied.

English and maths tutors will receive and review reports (available via the College Reporting System) of student attendance. After each lesson, the maths and English teachers should email course leaders details of students absent to their lesson. Teachers should address individual absence to their lessons with students the next time they see them. Individual student attendance concerns should be raised by the English or maths tutor directly with the Course Leader who will contact students and parents as per the process outlined above and record information on ProMonitor.

Where poor attendance has been escalated to Curriculum Managers by Course Leaders, and the attendance concern is specific to English and/or maths, the Head of English/Maths should be invited to the meetings with students and parents to jointly discuss concerns and set attendance targets.

Heads of English and maths should meet fortnightly with Faculty Directors to discuss attendance of students in their areas. Heads of English and Maths will share details of students with poor attendance with the Faculty Director to follow up with their team. Faculty Directors should advise the Head of English/Maths of general attendance updates and actions set in their areas and share information on students that the Heads may not be aware of.

5.4 Monitoring attendance to Careers Coaching and Progression (CCP) and Digital Skills

The careers coach will monitor attendance to CCP and Digital Skills using reports available via the College Reporting System and the process detailed above.

5.5 Attendance Awareness sessions

The aim of the attendance awareness session is to reinforce the College attendance expectations, the potential impact of poor attendance and punctuality on a positive student outcome. Sessions will be delivered during lunchtimes by a member of the tactical or operational management team on a rota basis. By the end of the session students should be able to describe the college's attendance expectations, explain why good attendance is important and evaluate their own attendance.

A student will be referred to the course if they do not attend at any point during the first six weeks of term, as part of the College six week strategy. The referral to an attendance awareness session should be made by their Careers Coach upon completion of the return to College interview.

Participation to the sessions will be shared with, and monitored by, the Careers Coach and recorded on ProMonitor. If students fail to attend without a genuine reason the Student Disciplinary Procedure should be followed.

5.6 Communication

It is important that the College builds respectful relationships with students, families and other stakeholders in order to secure trust and engagement. Communication should be open and honest so there is an understanding of what to expect and what is expected.

To ensure that the College communicates effectively with students and families regarding students' attendance, the following systems have been put in place:

- All comments recorded on ProMonitor will be emailed to students, parents and selected staff and available on the student and parent portals
- All meetings and associated documents will be emailed to students, parents and selected staff and available on the student and parent portals
- Daily texting (Study Programmes only) – a daily text message will be sent at 4pm to parents where their young person has been absent from any lesson that day. During the first six weeks, this will be for vocational courses only to ensure that registers and timetables are accurate and all student changes have been implemented.
- For Study Programme students, a weekly email to parents informing them of attendance in that week and reminding them about Parent Portal access.
- For Work Based students and apprentices, a weekly email to their employer, detailing attendance in that week.
- For HE and Part time students a weekly email to student detailing their attendance for that week and reminding of consequences of poor attendance in respect of impact on learning, place on course and financial support.
- For HE and Part time students a Standard letter to student at half-termly interval where attendance is poor inviting to 1:1 meeting with Curriculum Manager to discuss reasons.
- For students aged under 16, a phone call to the parent from the Safeguarding Officer **within 30 minutes** of the start of the lesson, informing them of their absence, in addition to the automated messaging. An automated report is sent directly to Campus Safeguarding and Prevent Officer of absences for all students under 16 and all Safeguarded students 4 times daily.
- Half termly letters to parents, and employers where relevant, from Curriculum Manager where attendance falls below College minimum target of 92%, with follow up meeting to identify causes and strategies for improvement, or to monitor these strategies and seek ways to mitigate impact on achievement.

5.7 Use of Student Disciplinary Process for persistent absence

It is considered to be a normal part of a teaching role that the Course Leader and Careers Coach will informally address a student's absence the next time they see them as detailed in section 5. It is expected that where there is no suitable reason for the absence provided, the student disciplinary process along with the Student Positive Behaviour guidance should be followed and all actions recorded on ProMonitor. The procedure has been updated to include restorative practice interventions and these practices along with disciplinary actions should be utilised for persistent attendance issues. This approach recognises that young people sometimes need time in order to develop the work skills that employers require from them, the restorative practice, disciplinary and strike process allows students opportunities to receive feedback, learn from their mistakes and move on to more positive behaviours.

For the purpose of clarity, 'poor' attendance is considered to be attendance that is below the College expectation without sufficient or adequate reason, i.e. lessons are missed and the student is not seriously unwell, seeking medical attention, or attending to some otherwise urgent business, such as a family funeral, and does not have a known difficulty that impacts their attendance. As such, 'persistently poor' attendance is defined as attendance that fits the description of 'poor' but does not improve despite the processes outlined in this policy.

It is recognised that for some students high anxiety contributes to low attendance. In these instances, as there is a known and understood reason for low attendance, this is not considered as 'poor' attendance. Similarly, there may be other personal, social or family related issues that can lead to low attendance. The same approach should be applied for these provided the issues are known to College and the Safeguarding team have been working collaboratively with the curriculum to support the student.

Staff teaching cohorts who are known to have had serious attendance issues in their previous educational establishments may find it useful to structure attendance interventions so as to encourage an improvement from previous attendance levels, whilst acknowledging that such students will take much longer to achieve College expected standards.

5.8 Rewards and Sanctions

Expectations and standards must be set from the outset by each Curriculum area and Course Leader so that high attendance becomes part of the normal culture of the College. Rewarding good attendance is as important as imposing sanctions on those with unacceptable attendance levels.

Curriculum Managers and Faculty Directors have the ability to create rewards and sanctions as they see fit according to their area and the nature and level of their students. Weekly reports will be sent to Curriculum Managers detailing students that have achieved 100% weekly study programme attendance and these students should have their excellent attendance rewarded by their Curriculum Manager.

Departmental league tables will be in place to monitor attendance on a half termly basis. Rewards will be issued for the study programme in each department with the highest attendance and the most progress each half term.

However, it is **expected** that students with persistently poor attendance and are at risk of non-achievement are sanctioned from attending College trips or taking part in sports fixtures, College shows or performances until their attendance to **all** lessons improves.

6. Key Responsibilities

In order for this policy to be a success, commitment from all College staff is required and full compliance with the processes set out in this policy is expected. For the purposes of clarity, this section sets out the roles and responsibilities of key College staff in relation to student attendance. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and collaborative working is expected from all members of College staff:

Vice Principal Learning and Quality:

- Set high expectations for all staff and students from the start of term.
- Oversees the operational and strategic implementation of this policy.
- Review and monitor attendance data regularly.

Executive Director, MIS and Planning:

- Provides attendance data and reporting to Executive team.
- Liaises with MIS to ensure accurate and timely data is available.
- Meets regularly with Faculty Directors to address persistent areas of concern.

Faculty Directors (and Executive Members with Curriculum responsibility):

- Set high expectations for all staff and students from the start of term.
- Take full responsibility for the implementation of all aspects of this policy within their own areas, including ensuring that Curriculum Managers and Course Leaders collaborate effectively with staff in other departments who deliver part of the Study Programme, e.g. English and Maths Teachers and Careers Coaches;
- Implement and lead on intervention strategies as set out in this policy and follow up directly with students who have two or more weeks absence
- Review monthly attendance data using MIS reports and ProMonitor reports
- Meet fortnightly with Heads of English and Maths and follow up with their teams
- Support Curriculum Managers/Head of Workforce Development to decide and implement reward and sanction schemes as relevant to area.

Head of Workforce Development:

- Sets high expectations for all staff and students from the start of term.

- Ensures that all employers understand their role and responsibility to ensure all work based students attend all College based aspects of their programme.
- Implements and leads on intervention strategies as set out in this policy as a priority at the start of term.
- Sets high expectations for all staff, students and employers from the start of term.
- Takes full responsibility for the implementation of all aspects of this policy within their own areas.
- Meet fortnightly with Heads of English and Maths and follow up with their team
- Uses ProMonitor to record strikes and disciplinary action related to attendance.
- Supports vocational Curriculum Managers to decide and implement reward and sanction schemes as relevant to area and type of learning.

Curriculum Managers:

- Set high expectations for all courses from Induction onwards and ensure that all staff uphold the same expectations.
- Ensure absences from students are followed up on as per the policy and process set out above.
- Review MIS and ProMonitor attendance reports in scheduled team meetings as per the College calendar.
- Discuss attendance on their courses and any students with persistent issues with Course Leaders and Careers Coaches.
- Where individual student attendance concerns have been escalated by the course leader or Heads of English and maths, maintain regular contact with parents, set attendance targets and action plan.
- Use ProMonitor to record all actions related to attendance.
- Work with Heads of Maths and English to identify and tackle any persistent issues with attendance at cross College lessons.
- Decide and implement reward and sanctions schemes within own area.

Heads of English and Maths:

- Set high expectations for all courses from Induction onwards and ensure that all staff uphold the same expectations.
- Ensure absences from students are followed up on as per the policy and process set out above.
- Review MIS and ProMonitor attendance reports in scheduled team meetings as per the College calendar.
- Meet fortnightly with Curriculum Managers and Head of Workforce Development to discuss attendance on their courses and any students with persistent attendance issues.
- Where individual student attendance concerns have been escalated by the course leader work with the Curriculum Manager to jointly maintain regular contact with parents, set attendance targets and action plans.
- Decide and implement reward and sanctions schemes within own area.

Quality Account Managers:

- Set high expectations for all work based students from the start of term and ensure that all Assessors uphold the same expectations.
- Ensure that employers understand their responsibilities to ensure their employees attend all aspects of College
- Ensure absences from students are followed up on as per the policy and process set out above.
- Use ProMonitor/One File to record strikes and disciplinary action related to attendance
- Meet regularly with Course Leaders to discuss attendance on their courses and any work based students with persistent issues.
- Maintain regular contact with employers where a student's attendance is below College target/of concern.

- Work with CMs for vocational areas and Maths & English, to identify and tackle any persistent issues with attendance at cross College lessons.

Course Leaders & Assessors:

- Set clear and high expectations with students for attendance at all aspects of Study Programme.
- Be responsible for the early intervention and escalation of student attendance issues as the main point of contact for the student
- Address each absence from their lesson with the student concerned personally in a sensitive and discrete manner.
- Liaise with other Teachers/Careers Coaches delivering across the course to ensure joined up approach to managing student absences.
- Use ProMonitor to record strikes and disciplinary action related to attendance.
- Escalate persistent or regular unexplained absence attendance to Curriculum Managers set out in the above policy
- Deliver engaging Tutorials that regularly reinforce attendance expectations
- Engage fully in faculty agreed reward and sanction mechanisms to ensure that students are rewarded for good attendance, and that there is a consequence for poor attendance.

Teachers:

- Address each absence from their lesson with the student concerned personally in a sensitive and discrete manner.
- Make Course Leader and Careers Coach aware of persistent or regular unexplained absence from their lessons.
- Make recommendations to Course Leaders for 'we missed you'/praise postcards.
- Engage fully in faculty agreed reward and sanction mechanisms to ensure that students are rewarded for good attendance, and that there is a consequence for poor attendance.

Careers Coaches:

- Support Course Leaders to address each absence with the student concerned personally in a sensitive and discrete manner.
- Work collaboratively with Course Leaders to address persistent absence or punctuality issues with individual students through 1:1 tutorials in order to identify root cause and support student to find solutions and overcome barriers to attendance. Ensure these are well-documented on ProMonitor in order that all staff working with a student understands the challenges they face
- Ensure any necessary referrals are made to the Safeguarding team
- Use ProMonitor to record all actions related to attendance.
- Complete return to College interviews with students and ensure recorded on ProMonitor
- Ensure students identified as 'attendance at risk' on ProMonitor are regularly shared with Curriculum Managers
- Make recommendations to Course Leaders for 'we missed you'/praise postcards.
- Ensure that attendance and engagement is communicated as a key employability skill to all students.
- Hold ongoing attendance clinics for those students with persistent poor attendance

Curriculum Administrators:

- Update registers with informed absences each morning (this should include English, maths and other cross college provision)
- Support Curriculum Managers and Faculty Directors to arrange meetings and phone calls with parents as required by this policy.
- Support teaching staff with sending out postcards as needed.
- Support Curriculum Managers to send agreed attendance reporting letters and emails as required by this policy.

Equality Impact Statement

We have a duty to consider the impact of changes on groups with Protected Characteristics (race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership).

<p>What are the overall aims of the change? Why are you proposing it?</p>	<p>The aim of this policy is to provide a framework to ensure that the guidelines are in place to support all stakeholders. Amendments made for 2020/21 include the addition of an Attendance and Engagement Strategy. This aims to improve clarity of messaging, and recognise the value of engagement, particularly in the light of increased blended learning experiences.</p>
<p>Given the aims of your proposal, what issues does your data/information highlight?</p>	<p>Everybody is included within this policy, and all groups are treated equally in regards to their needs and provisions</p>
<p>How could the proposed change affect positively/negatively on groups with protected characteristics?</p>	<p>This has a positive impact on all groups with protected characteristics, as they are ensured equal treatment and provision based on their needs. Amendments for 2020/21 specifically seeks to address physical and mental health issues as potential factors in poor attendance and engagement. Risk assessments may be carried out to ensure that those with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged.</p>
<p>What actions will you take to mitigate any negative impact?</p>	<p>No negative impact to having this policy</p>
<p>Is there any potential negative impact justified in light of wider benefits of the proposal</p>	<p>No negative impact to having this policy</p>
<p>Recording final decision</p>	<p>This policy requires Executive and Corporation approval</p>
<p>Has the policy taken into consideration the requirements of GDPR regulations? Are there any actions that need addressing, e.g.; data sharing agreement; has data consent been considered; data retention timescales?</p>	<p>GDPR regulations have been considered and actions comply with data protection requirements.</p>