Attendance and Engagement
Policy and Strategy
2020-21

Responsible Officer: Executive Director, Student Support & Services
Date Reviewed: August 2020
Next Review Date: August 2021
Policy Available: Intranet and Website
Authorised by: Executive

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 2020/21.

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.

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) and is widely advertised around College campuses. Students, parent & guardians are required to text the College on every day of absence (see appendix A) 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.

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 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

5. Monitoring

5.1 Standard Process - Study Programmes & Work-based Students
- Teachers address every absence personally with students when they next see them. Strikes are applied via ProMonitor where there is no acceptable reason for the absence (see below under Use Disciplinary Process).
- 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.
- 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 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.
- Phone call to parents by Faculty Director where student has been absent for 2 weeks or more, regardless of whether this has been previously notified/informed. For Work Based students this phone call should be made by the Quality Account Manager or Head of Work Based Learning to the student's employer. If the absence is not related to ill-health consideration should be given as to whether the student requires additional information, advice or guidance, or individual, impartial careers guidance.
- Monthly meeting with Executive Director Student Support & Services to review students by faculty and consider any recurring or persistent issues that can be mitigated or reduced.

5.2 HE Programmes & Part Time Students
- 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**.**
- Standard letter to student at half-termly interval where attendance is poor inviting to 1:1 meeting with Curriculum Manager to discuss reasons.

As noted in section 4.1 above, any absence in the very early part of <u>any</u> course will be considered a significant cause for concern, and therefore, during the first three weeks of term a 'High Impact Attendance Monitoring Process' will be in place.

<u>5.3 High Impact Attendance Monitoring Process</u>
- **daily telephone contact** will be made with **students and parents** where there is an absence from any lesson by the Faculty Director, or Head of Workforce Development.
- Urgent IAG or Careers Advice should be considered where any student is not enjoying their programme, following the College's '6 Week Right-Course Strategy'.
- This strategy applies for all types of learning, including HE and Part Time.

This High Impact Attendance Monitoring Process may be re-applied at various points throughout the year, e.g. first week back after Christmas Break, to reinforce good habits and encourage students to return to their normal routine as quickly as possible. This will usually be decided by the Executive Director, Student Support & Services, and the Vice Principal, Learning and Quality. It is the responsibility of the Faculty Director to ensure that the High Impact Attendance Monitoring Process is followed correctly in their area, recognising that personal contact from a senior staff member may have more impact. Therefore it is expected that the Faculty Director engages with contacting students and parents personally - although it is recognised that the volume of calls may be such that they may require support from other team members in order to complete this process in a timely way. It is expected that when this process is in operation, Faculty Directors, Curriculum Managers, Course Leaders and Curriculum Administrators prioritise this function over other work tasks.

It is expected that during the first 3 weeks of term especially, Curriculum Managers, Quality Account Managers, Faculty Directors and other cross College Managers regularly challenge students in common areas of the College campus who do not appear to be in lessons to check where they are meant to be.

<u>5.4 Use of College Disciplinary Process</u>
It is considered to be a normal part of a teaching role that the Teacher will informally address a student's absence the next time they see them (see section 4.5 and section 5). It is expected that where there is no suitable reason for the absence provided, the student should be verbally warned that this is not satisfactory, and a strike should be marked against their Disciplinary Record on ProMonitor. Should a further absence occur without a satisfactory reason, a further strike must be applied. The College Disciplinary Process should be followed thus for persistent absence issues. This approach recognises that young people sometimes need time in order to develop the work skills that employers require from them, the 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 discussions and reminders and warnings from staff.

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 support staff and are validated by external sources. 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.

5.5 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. These may include league tables of attendance and inter-departmental competitions with small end of term rewards for groups who have the highest attendance.

However, it is **expected** that students with persistently poor attendance to any part of their Study Programme 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:

Executive Team:
- Set high expectations for all staff and students from the start of term.
- Oversee the delivery of the policy.
- Review and monitor attendance data regularly.

Executive Director, Student Support & Services:
- Oversees the operational and strategic implementation of this policy.
- 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.
- Implement and lead on early intervention strategies as set out in this policy as a priority at the start of term, including implementation of the 'High Impact Attendance Monitoring Process'.
- Take full responsibility for the implementation of all aspects of this policy within their own areas, including ensuring that Course Leaders collaborate effectively with staff in other departments who deliver part of the Study Programme, e.g. English and Maths Teachers and Performance Coaches;
- 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 early 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.
- 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.
- Decide and implement reward and sanctions schemes within own area.
- Ensure absences from students are followed up on as per the policy and process set out above.
- Meet regularly with Course Leaders to discuss attendance on their courses and any students with persistent issues.
- Maintain regular contact with parents where a student's attendance is below College target/of concern.
- Use ProMonitor to record strikes and disciplinary action related to attendance.
- Work with Curriculum Managers for Maths and English, and Head of Student Services for Tutorials and Directed Study, to identify and tackle any persistent issues with attendance at cross College lessons.

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
- learning, including exams, and that this should be a priority aspect of their work based learning programme.
- Ensure absences from students are followed up on as per the policy and process set out above.
- Use ProMonitor 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 during Induction period for attendance at all aspects of Study Programme.
- Liaise with other Teachers/Performance Coaches delivering across the course to ensure joined up approach to managing student absences.
- Address each absence from their lesson with the student concerned personally in a sensitive and discrete manner.
- Use ProMonitor to record strikes and disciplinary action related to attendance.
- Make Curriculum Managers aware of persistent or regular unexplained absence from their lessons.
- Utilise 'we missed you'/praise postcards.
- Deliver engaging Tutorials
- 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 Curriculum Manager 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.

Performance Coaches:
- Address each absence from Career Coaching and Performance lessons with the student concerned personally in a sensitive and discrete manner.
- Use ProMonitor to record strikes and disciplinary action related to attendance.
- Make Course Leader and Curriculum Manager 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.
- 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 that attendance and engagement is communicated as a key employability skill to all students.

Curriculum Administrators:
- 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.

Campus Safeguarding and Prevent Officers (Designated Safeguarding Leads):
- Ensure all parents of students aged under 16 are contacted where the student is absent within 30 minutes of the start of a lesson.

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).

What are the overall aims of the change? Why are you proposing it?	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.
Given the aims of your proposal, what issues does your data/information highlight?	Everybody is included within this policy, and all groups are treated equally in regards to their needs and provisions
How could the proposed change affect positively/negatively on groups with protected characteristics?	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.
What actions will you take to mitigate any negative impact?	No negative impact to having this policy
Is there any potential negative impact justified in light of wider benefits of the proposal	No negative impact to having this policy
Recording final decision	This policy requires Executive approval
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?	GDPR regulations have been considered and actions comply with data protection requirements.

Attendance and Engagement Strategy 2020-21

Intent

This strategy reflects the key factors outlined in the College Attendance and Engagement Policy and outlines the responses aimed at improving student experience, attainment and measurement against the College key performance indicators.

As far back as 2013 an Association of Colleges/Ofsted project (Improving attendance and punctuality: strategies, approaches and lessons learning from London colleges, Ofsted, 2013) found "much support for the idea of measuring engagement or participation in learning rather than, or as well as, learners' physical attendance." In 2020 a global pandemic resulted in all College learning and teaching moving online. During this period staff were able to observe the challenges and opportunities of this approach. A revised strategy for 2020/21 offers the opportunity to learn from these observations and seeks to retain the positive aspects.

Factor	Response
Boredom/ inertia	Inspired teaching 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

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,

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.

Induction

The Induction Week programme in 2020 is amended significantly from previous iterations. This reflects:

- Student and staff feedback from previous iterations around clarity of expectations.
- The necessity of managing student traffic on campus in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Positive review of successful online/remote learning experiences during the Covid-19 lockdown of Spring/Summer 2020 by students and staff.

Throughout Induction Week there is a positive affirmation of the roles of staff, and the activities in place as a support mechanism for students, rather than a form of "policing".

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 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 Performance Coaches.

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 outs 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.

Effective Monitoring

It is essential that students are contacted when they are absent without explanation; it is equally important that parents, guardians and employers (for apprentices) are informed when a student does not attend lessons in College. In order for this to happen in a timely manner, the College expects that all Teachers, Performance Coaches, Assessors and other staff delivering timetabled sessions, complete registers within 15 minutes of the lesson start time. It is recognised that establishing contact with students and parents/guardians can be time consuming; therefore, it is essential that smart practices are in place across the College. A range of manual and automated messaging will be implemented to notify parents, guardians and employers of any absence on a daily or weekly basis as set out below, however this is not intended to replace personal communication by Teachers, Assessors and Performance Coaches, but to enhance it:

Impact

The success of this strategy will be measured by improvements in attendance data, evidence of engagement, and positive Student Voice responses. It is hoped that destinations data would also be positively impacted.