



Richmond upon
Thames College

Policy Name: Student Attendance and Punctuality Policy 2020-21

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Policy Responsibility: Deputy Principal & CEO, Curriculum & Quality

Approved By: College Leadership Team

For Action By: All managers and curriculum staff

For Information to: All College staff, students and parents/guardians

Introduction

This policy outlines the approach taken by Richmond upon Thames College to encourage excellent attendance and punctuality in order to help improve student retention, achievement and employability skills. It also covers the specific procedure for monitoring attendance and punctuality.

This policy applies to full-time and part-time FE students. Separate arrangements apply to students enrolled on apprenticeships and Higher Education courses.

Students are expected to establish and maintain excellent attendance and punctuality at all College classes and other learning activities which are part of their timetable as it is seen as key to student success. At Richmond upon Thames College the expectation is that attendance and punctuality is 100%.

The College's Approach to improving attendance and punctuality

Rationale

Understanding the reasons for poor attendance and punctuality is at the heart of devising strategies to tackle it successfully. At Richmond upon Thames College the focus on improving attendance and punctuality incorporates:

- **A whole-college ethos of high expectations for students' attendance and punctuality.**

Richmond upon Thames College recognises that strategies for improving attendance and punctuality work best when it is seen as everyone's responsibility and the whole-college ethos is linked to employability and future life chances. All senior leadership and duty managers will understand the value of 'corridor walks' in between sessions and it is the responsibility of all staff to challenge students who, while they may be at college, do not seem to be in sessions or engaged in other productive work. Students themselves suggest that poor attendance is often about missing sessions rather than whole days.

- **Student-centred timetabling**

This means that all students have regular breaks throughout the day. Study programme students attend College at least 3 days a week with a minimum of 2 lessons per day. Timetables are planned to avoid large gaps and to enable and encourage study programme students to attend English and maths.

- **Early intervention for 'at risk' students**

Research suggests that the early identification of 'at risk' students, understanding their barriers to excellent attendance and punctuality and agreeing step by step action plans which are monitored regularly, can be highly effective.

- **The quality of teaching in the classroom**

High expectations by teachers and good teaching in the classroom have a positive impact on attendance. That benefit is either learning something new, mastering skills, or being motivated and inspired to learn more. Richmond upon Thames College is committed to the delivery of high-quality lessons and will monitor patterns of attendance to identify any potential issues.

- **Robust reporting of attendance and punctuality**

College MIS systems will be teacher friendly and enable tutors, in particular, to chase up poor attendance and punctuality quickly. The information a tutor needs to follow up poor attendance and punctuality will be made available through the risks indicators and reports available through ProMonitor and ProSolutions. The effectiveness of reports will be reviewed at least termly and adapted where needed.

- **A consistent college-wide approach to following up poor attendance and punctuality**

A fair and consistent approach, as described in this policy, will be adopted by all curriculum areas to avoid students being confused by inconsistency between subject teachers and curriculum areas.

This policy addresses the attendance and punctuality expectations and the processes and procedures to be followed when a student has been identified as 'at risk' and their attendance and punctuality is below expectation.

Student Notification of Absence

- All absences should be reported using attend@rutc.ac.uk or to the mobile number on the back of the Student ID card before 9 a.m. on each day of absence. The student should include their name, ID number, course and reason for absence in the communication.
- Students who become ill during the day and need to leave college should go to Reception, in the first instance, who will follow the procedure in line with College guidance at that time. This will reflect the latest government guidelines on preventing Covid 19 transmission.
- Students need to give the reason for absence, and how long they expect to be absent. Students must also provide the relevant evidence to support absences, where applicable, on their return and give this to their tutor.

Targets for Attendance and Punctuality

The expectation is that attendance and punctuality is 100%.

College targets on the overall **annual** attendance and punctuality should be no less than 86% and 97% respectively. The attendance target is derived from research conducted by the AoC and Ofsted on attendance in London Colleges and represents the top end of the attendance range.

Punctuality – a College-wide approach

Roles and Responsibilities

1. The Teacher

All lessons will start on time regardless of the number of students in class and the classroom door is closed to indicate that the lesson has started. Teachers plan lessons to incorporate times when late students can be admitted to the lesson. How a late student is brought 'up to speed' is at the teacher's discretion, but this must not be at the expense of the learning of other students who arrived on time.

Students will always be admitted to the lesson no matter how late they are attending. Lateness must be addressed robustly and with appropriate sanctions (see below), but this does not include turning a late student away from the lesson, as this is counter-productive in terms of learning.

Teachers will praise students who are on time and ready to learn. They will discuss the reason for lateness with late arrivals at appropriate times during the lesson so that other students are not disrupted.

Where there is a persistent pattern of lateness this will be addressed through the tutorial system as below.

2. The Student

At 'Welcome to Richmond' induction, all students are informed by their tutor how they should report they are going to be late. That is, use the attend@rutc.ac.uk email address to report they are running late and the reason they are late. Knock on the classroom door and then wait for the teacher to admit them to the lesson. Sit where the teacher has indicated without disturbing other students. In the event that a student refuses to sit where the teacher has allocated then no attempt by students or teachers should be made to help this student catch up.

3. The Manager

At the start of each day all managers will be corridor walking to tackle latecomers and support teachers in dealing with them. This is also repeated throughout the day at key times and especially after the lunchtime break.

4. The Tutor

Every six weeks tutors will check their students' punctuality to ensure it has not fallen below 97%. Punctuality below 97% will need to be followed up and discussed with the students to find out the reason for this. An action will be recorded on Pro Monitor with a reasonable timeframe for this to be completed and reviewed to evaluate the impact. Only in exceptional circumstances will the disciplinary system be put in motion for poor punctuality as this would imply that by stage 3 the student could be excluded. It is not the expectation that the College would exclude a student for poor punctuality.

Attendance – a College-wide approach

Roles and Responsibilities

1. The Teacher

Teachers will mark the register **before the end of the lesson** enabling tutors to follow up absence as quickly as possible and SMS text messaging to be sent out as soon as an absence is reported. (SMS text messaging to parents starts after the October half term.)

2. The Tutor

In the first six weeks of the academic year the Tutor will

- Follow up any absent student by telephone on the day of absence. For students aged 16-18 on study programmes this may be with the parent by telephone in the first instance. If there is no response, tutors must send an email to the student's college email address, with a copy to parents. If follow-up on the day is impossible then this action must be completed weekly.
- Explain to students how they should use attend@rutc.ac.uk or the text number on the reverse of their ID card to report absence.
- Explain what an authorised absence is and what evidence is needed to evidence this (Appendix 1). Explain that if students do not attend the College for at least 4 continuous weeks and have not informed the College of any reason for absence they will automatically be withdrawn from their programme of study (appeals against withdrawals may be referred to the Deputy Principal, Curriculum and Quality within one week.)
- Explain the link between employability and attendance and punctuality and the link to the use of references by employers which often ask for attendance and attitude information.
- Check that the contact details of parents are up to date (both email and mobile phone numbers). for students aged 16-18 and where there are updates the curriculum administrator will ensure the student database is updated. This is to enable swift follow up in cases of concern.
- Ensure that every student in their tutor group completes the Pro Monitor sections on 'My Goals' and 'Strengths and Development – about me' to identify any problems early on and to log these on the Group Profile
- Plan one to one meetings of 10-15 minutes with each student during the first 4 weeks of term. This is either a congratulations short meeting to recognise 100% attendance and punctuality, or a longer meeting to find out what the issues are and to address them, or to recommend transferring to a different course if this is the appropriate solution.

- Refer students to Student Services where there is a health, welfare or safeguarding reason for absence or if there is a concern about the attendance of students who are Looked After Young People/Care Leavers/Young Carers/Safeguarding issues (Safeguarding and Equalities Officer).
- Withdraw students who have not attended the College for at least 4 continuous weeks and have not informed the College of any reason for absence.

For the remainder of the academic year, in addition to the above, the Tutor will

- Continue to follow up unauthorised absences, as a minimum, every week.
- Check the student's attendance every six weeks and during every one-to-one meeting (at least every 6 weeks), not forgetting to specifically look at their attendance in English and maths classes. Notice should be paid to the pattern of absence, e.g. particular subjects/modules, to identify potential issues. Students with attendance of over 90% require just a reminder that attendance is expected to be 100%. Students with 89-85% attendance require a step by step action plan to improve attendance with SMART targets set. This is monitored by the tutor on a weekly basis. Students with attendance of 84% and below will trigger the start of the disciplinary or Fitness to Study process.

3. The Head of School (and Assistant Head of School as appropriate)

- Check tutors and teachers are following the agreed process for following up absences by spot checking the SMART targets set and impact of Pro Monitor action plans to enable students to improve.
- Participate in GOAL walks, with CLT and other managers, to monitor attendance within the curriculum area.
- Agree which courses with poor attendance need a rapid response team to investigate. Organise the team and participate in the investigation, stipulate time scales for feedback and monitor that the actions needed to mitigate or eliminate the reasons for absence are completed. Report back to the COG meeting on actions taken and impact.
- Monitor and track students' progress through the disciplinary process and participate as stipulated in the Student Support and Disciplinary Policy.

4. MIS

- Send SMS text messages to parents starting from after the October half term and continuing throughout the year
- Suspend the text messages if requested by parents in the case of a known health condition.
- Ensure parents/carers are able to access Parent Portal where eligible
- Providing reports for tutors and managers (See Appendix 2)

5. Reception

- Monitor the attend@rutc.ac.uk email account and the mobile phone text system each morning and record all episodes of absence on pro-solution using agreed register marks
- Record absence on the student's pro-monitor page ensuring the relevant staff are sent the comment
- Inform safeguarding@rutc.ac.uk where the absence or a pattern of absence raises a safeguarding or welfare concern

6. Student Services

- Will pay bursaries to students if attendance is 90% or above and pay students on a pro-rata basis if attendance falls below 90%. No payment will be made if attendance is below 60%
- The payment of Bursary will consider individual student circumstances and where attendance is below 60% the decision to pay a portion of the Bursary may be taken following consultation between the Student Services Officer and the Tutor.
- If the student disputes the stopped payment(s) they must talk to the Student Service Officer who will investigate and inform student and Tutor of the outcome.
- If the student is not satisfied they can appeal in writing to the Head of Student Experience within one week of the decision. Students must provide full details of dates and reasons for absence and explain why they think the bursary should be paid. The Head of Student Experience will consider the appeal and respond within five working days of the receipt of the appeal. The decision of the Head of Student Experience is final.)

6. The Student

- Attend all lessons on their timetable and arrive before the start of the lesson properly equipped and prepared
- **Always** inform RuTC in advance of any unavoidable absences in advance (Appendix 2). Students should be aware of what will be considered an authorised absence (see Appendix 1) and absence must be supported by providing the evidence or documentation required. Where the absence is unauthorised the register will be marked according.
- Regularly monitor their own levels of attendance on the Student Portal and set targets for improvement
- Inform the College of any updates to their or their parents contact details.
- Understand the expectations of attendance (100%) and punctuality (97% and above), and the potential consequences of poor attendance and punctuality in relation to their progress, achievement, and employability. The consequences of poor attendance and punctuality are outlined below:

Where it is apparent there are issues with a student's attendance the tutor will initially hold discussions with them to identify potential barriers to attendance and punctuality. Discussions should also be held with parents of 16-18-year-old students where required. An action plan with SMART targets will be set and student support services involved where required.

Continued poor attendance will result in the implementing of the student disciplinary policy or Fitness to Study policy, with SMART targets set at each stage in order to try and resolve the barriers affecting attendance.

Persistent poor attendance, following interventions, may lead to Stage 3 of the processes and withdrawal of the student.

Where attendance improves following intervention, this should be recognised and comments of congratulations on Promonitor made or letters of congratulations sent.

- Arrange doctors and other appointments out of College hours
- Not have work commitments that clash with their College timetable; any absence for work will be unauthorised by the college (except where it is agreed work experience)
- Make arrangements to catch up on any work missed during their absence with support as required

7. Contact with Parents (students aged <18)

Parents/guardians will be made aware of student attendance through the use of messaging via MIS and through the use of Parent Portal where they will be able to access their son/daughters attendance record. Parents will be made aware of how to access Parent Portal at enrolment and at the start of each term.

Richmond upon Thames College recognises its safeguarding responsibilities in relation to students who are missing education. Therefore, where a student aged <18 is absent or late without explanation and there is concern, the parent/guardian will be contacted except where there is a known safeguarding reason that would prohibit this.

The college will work with parents and where a parent has requested not to be contacted via MIS messages, as there is a known health or personal reason for the absence, MIS will flag this on Pro-solution to stop the messages.

Appendix 1: Authorised Absences

Authorised Absence	Evidence Required
Serious illness, recovery from operation or recuperation after illness	Hospital/Doctor's card or appointment letter
Acute episodes of known medical condition e.g. mental health condition such as anxiety depression; asthma; Crohn's disease; disability	This must be disclosed to the College along with the submission of medical evidence to support the diagnosis. Once provided this can be flagged on Pro Monitor.
Hospital appointments	Confirmation of Appointment letters/cards/email or text reminders
Jury service	Official letter of notification is required in advance
Attendance at probation meetings or court	This will be authorised as long as official documentation is submitted as evidence
University visit/HE interview	Must be notified in advance with letter/email inviting student to the appointment
Job interview	Evidence of the interview is required, e.g. letter, email.
Attendance at family funeral (1 day unless significant travel, maximum 3 days)	Will be authorised if notified in advance with a letter from a parent/guardian if under 19
Recognised religious holiday (day of holiday only)	Must be notified in advance
Practical Driving Test	Official appointment letter/email
Participation in significant extra curricula activities	Email from member of staff organising the activity
Large scale transport disruption, as acknowledged by the College	This will be clarified and a decision made by the College
Care of a family member where the student has formal caring responsibility	This absence must be notified in advance.
Absence as a consequence of disability or other equality reason	This will be authorised if it meets the requirements of legislation and is a reasonable adjustment.

The following are NOT acceptable and will not be authorised.

Isolated illnesses (headache/cold, etc)	Leisure activities
Regular transport delays	Birthdays or similar celebrations
Routine dentist, doctor or optician appointments (proof still required)	Driving Lessons or Theory Test
Holidays	Shopping
Work	Babysitting or looking after siblings
Waiting at home for arrival of delivery/service	

The above list is not an exhaustive list and the College reserves the right to decide what is and is not an acceptable reason for absence. The College recognises that known medical conditions and care responsibilities of family members may affect a student's ability to attend College. These should be declared at enrolment or as soon as status is known and evidence of any health condition provided. Where there are a high number of authorised absences due to a known condition/circumstance a review meeting will be held to minimise the impact on study.

Appendix 2

Attendance: Absence Form

Student Name:	
Student ID:	
Today's Date:	

Reason for Absence	✓	Date of Absence	Morning Absence Time of appt.	Afternoon Absence Time of appt.	All day Absence (Y/N)
Dentist Appointment					
Doctor's Appointment					
Hospital Appointment					
Off sick					
Driving – Practical/Theory Test					
Jury Service					
Court Appearance, Probation or YOT appointments					
Job Interview					
University Interview					
University Open Day					
Bereavement/Funeral					
Public Transport delays/Cancellations					

Please provide details/reason of your absence in the below box, if it is not listed in the above table:

Office Use Only:

Evidence of absence seen:

Entered on Pro Monitor:

Appendix 3: MIS Reports

1. Tutor Report on unauthorised absences

Drop down for curriculum area, tutor name, date range

Report show course name, course code, student name, student number, student email address, student mobile number, parent/guarding name, parent/guardian mobile phone number, parent/guarding email, parent/guarding address followed by a list of unauthorised absences by date, time and name of lesson missed

2. Report on % attendance by student

Drop down for curriculum area, course, date range, % attendance (all, 90 to 100%, 89 – 85%, 84-80%, below 80%)

Report will list all students on a particular course with their % attendance.

3. Attendance league table report

Drop down for curriculum area, date range, full time or part time

Report lists all FE courses from the highest attendance to the lowest attendance.