UHI Student Support Funds Policy: Attendance Appendix 2022-23

1. Overview

1.1   This appendix sets out the regional approach for Further Education funding attendance requirements. The guidance will be used by all colleges in the UHI partnership to ensure parity of experience for students and to limit risk for colleges.

1.2   The guidance below is based on Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidance, and adds further information for the areas where there is discretion available. The appendix fulfils the SFC Fund Management and Audit Information requirement that colleges should:

- Implement their own rules for measuring satisfactory attendance, participation and engagement
- Produce their own guidance for authorised absence
- Operate these rules and guidance consistently across the college

1.3   Attendance and engagement are critical parts of being a student and courses are designed on the principle of students attending all classes. Attendance and time management are valuable transferable skills for progression in academic studies or for employment.

2. Guidance

2.1   The expectation set out by the SFC is for students to attend all their classes; this will be assessed through attendance monitoring. Student attendance will be expressed as a percentage of the overall classes attended.

2.2   Examples of authorised absences identified by SFC include, but are not limited to:

- Self-certificated absence because of illness. Medical certificates should normally be submitted for illnesses lasting for more than five working days.
- Absences due to pandemic self-isolation requirements where the class cannot be attended remotely.
- Religious holidays (but not other holidays).
- Work experience placements.
- College agreed exam preparation.
- Attendance at children's hearing, court, meeting related to caring responsibilities or care needs, etc.
- Unexpected caring responsibilities, either for the student's child(ren) or an adult dependant, such as the illness of a child or dependant.
- Severe weather and transport breakdown.
- Attendance at a family funeral.
- Medical or dental appointments for either the student, or a child or adult who is dependent on the student. This can include non-emergency appointments if these cannot be arranged outside college hours, although every effort should be made to avoid clashes with classes.
- Fulfilment of an official position e.g. HISA representation
- Jury duty

As soon as a student becomes aware of an absence from the criteria above they should inform relevant staff via the College's official absence reporting processes.

Levels and patterns of authorised absences will be monitored to ensure the system is not abused.

2.3   Any absence that is not considered a valid authorised absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

2.4 **Attendance Thresholds**

    2.4.1   Students should aim to attend 100% of their scheduled activity. Both authorised and unauthorised absences will affect a student's attendance percentage.

    2.4.2   The reporting period is the duration over which attendance is calculated. The payment schedules are the frequency that payments are made for different types of support fund.
Reporting Period: This is each two week block.
Payment Schedule: Payments are made every two weeks in arrears subject to satisfactory attendance, engagement and progress.

    2.4.3   If attendance falls below 100% of scheduled activity for the reporting period local informal interventions may be used to engage with students in order to reinforce the benefits of attendance and engagement and help improve it.

    2.4.4   If attendance falls below 85% of scheduled activity for the reporting period formal interventions will commence.

2.5 Where students have failed to maintain the required attendance threshold set out above, staff will consider whether the student has taken reasonable steps to engage with their studies. Examples of appropriate student engagement include, but are not limited to:

- Maintaining contact with relevant college staff, explaining the reasons for absence and the steps they are taking to engage with their studies.
- Keeping up to date with learning by obtaining lecture notes, online resources or other learning materials from college staff.
- Demonstrating that they have engaged in independent study to keep up to date with their learning.
- Handing in assignments or classwork in a timely fashion, unless there are mitigating factors.
- Continuing to meet their learning objectives.
- Engaging with the college in any other way which demonstrates that they are continuing to participate in their studies.

3. Attendance and Engagement Support Procedures

Stage 1

3.1 Students falling below the attendance threshold set out in 2.4 and not maintaining appropriate engagement will be contacted by staff in order to discuss strategies for improving attendance. Local systems can be used to inform this process. Students will be able to confidentially disclose any barriers to attendance or engagement they may be experiencing.

3.2 Students will be informed that should their attendance not improve and they are not meeting engagement requirements they are at risk of having student support funds they are eligible for reduced or withdrawn, and any overpayments reclaimed. An agreed timeframe for improvement and the student's understanding will be recorded on local systems, along with any evidence from learner support and academic staff regarding attendance and engagement.

3.3 Students who do not participate in the Stage 1 process will have their funding withdrawn, and any overpayments reclaimed, if they are not achieving appropriate engagement and will be required to arrange a meeting with the appropriate members of staff in order to discuss having their funding reinstated.

Stage 2

3.4 If attendance does not improve, or improves and then declines within the same academic year, the student will be required to attend a formal meeting and agree an Attendance and Engagement Support Plan with staff.

3.5   Students who do not participate in the Stage 2 process will have their funding withdrawn, and any overpayments reclaimed, where they are not achieving appropriate engagement and will be required to arrange a meeting with the appropriate members of staff in order to discuss having their funding reinstated.

Stage 3

3.5   Students who have been through Stages 1 and 2 will not be invited to attend another meeting within the same academic year if issues continue or reoccur**. Instead, withdrawal or reduction of student support funds may initiate immediately if they are not achieving appropriate engagement**. The onus will then be on the student to engage with staff in order to agree a plan for improving attendance and engagement.

Personal Learning Support Plans (PLSPs)

3.6   Where a student has complex circumstances or health issues (including mental health issues) which may impact on their attendance, the College may exercise particular flexibility with regards to attendance. The College will agree attendance and participation plans directly with the student in these circumstances and this will be reflected in the student's PLSP. Changes to attendance and engagement requirements in a PLSP should be agreed in coordination with the staff responsible for student funding.

PLSPs are created in partnership with a student in response to a disclosed need. Attendance may form part of the PLSP, but issues around attendance alone would not justify the creation of a PLSP. There is local support available for students to access if they have concerns around how their personal circumstances may be affecting attendance and engagement. For further information, the local Student Support team should be contacted and the Learner Support Policy consulted.

Legislative Responsibilities

3.7   All colleges in the UHI partnership have due regard to equalities legislation and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 when considering the position of students with protected characteristics and care experienced students. Colleges may exercise increased flexibility when considering attendance issues for groups of students impacted by this legislation (for example care experienced students, disabled students, student parents and those on maternity/paternity/ adoption leave). In addition, colleges will be mindful of their corporate parenting responsibilities under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

4. Monitoring and Changes to SFC Guidance

4.1   Colleges will utilise local means of monitoring and reporting on attendance. This information will be used as appropriate for regional level reporting and analysis.

4.2   Annual changes to SFC policy will be considered by the Student Support Funds Policy Ownership Group and any necessary amendments made to the Attendance and Engagement Appendix made.