



“Inspiring learning, developing character, building futures”

Student Support Policies and Procedures

Student Special Leave Policy

Aim: The aim of this policy is to clarify the college’s position on student leave of absence during term time.

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1. Introduction

There is a significant relationship between attendance and achievement. Losing vital days/weeks of study has been shown to result in students underperforming in both exams and coursework. Blackpool Sixth therefore has a responsibility to ensure students achieve their full potential and maximise their employability skills/life chances by avoiding unnecessary periods of absence.

Blackpool Sixth expects college to take priority. This means that other activities should be arranged outside of students' college commitments, for example, all holidays must be taken outside of term time. It is recognised that there may be very rare occasions where a student may require a leave of absence from college due to significant extenuating circumstances. This policy clarifies the college's position and procedures in terms of special leave.

2. Scope of the policy

This policy is applicable to all students. It is sub-divided into three categories:

- a) Holidays in term time
- b) Compassionate leave
- c) Other special leave

This policy does not confer any automatic entitlement to leave. Each application for leave will be considered on its merits and with the student's welfare, academic and future success at the heart of any decision.

Throughout this policy the term *immediate relative* includes parents, grandparents, brother, sister, father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law. The college will also consider applications for leave in the case of individuals treated as immediate relatives but not included in the above.

Please note: This policy does not cover the following absences that are covered in the Attendance Policy:

- illness
- medically advised absence
- a hospital appointment or course of medical treatment that cannot be arranged outside college hours - usually up to one day
- An orthodontist appointment (usually up to half day)
- visit to university to attend an open day/interview or a career related interview/audition - usually up to one day
- attendance at a wedding of an immediate relative - usually up to one day
- attendance at a graduation, or similar ceremony, of an immediate relative - usually up to one day
- attendance at a funeral of an immediate relative - usually up to one day
- attendance at court or an appointment with a legal adviser - usually up to one day
- an external public examination (e.g practical driving test, performing arts examinations) - usually up to half day

Please check the Student Attendance Policy for full details of authorised and unauthorised absences.

3. Holidays in term time

The college's policy on holidays in term time applies to students from the point of enrolment at the college.

Blackpool Sixth does not normally permit holidays during term time.

If there are extenuating circumstances surrounding the holiday request, then permission must be sought from the Principal, as soon as possible in advance of booking/arranging the holiday. This must be done by completing a special leave request form, which can be requested from a student's Progress Mentor. Requests received within 10 college days before the leave is due to start may not be considered and the leave, if taken, will be unauthorised.

All extenuating circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be taken into consideration alongside current attendance levels and the impact on studies and progression.

4. Compassionate leave

Compassionate leave is intended to be used in exceptional circumstances, for example in the event of a bereavement or serious illness of an immediate relative.

A student or their parent/carer should, in the first instance, inform the student's Progress Mentor of the need to take compassionate leave as soon as possible, or at the latest on the first day of absence.

Every bereavement or serious illness is different; some students may feel able to return to college very swiftly, whilst others may need more time. The relationship with the relative, and the circumstances will all have an impact on the student, particularly if the death or illness was sudden or traumatic. It is often difficult for students in these situations to judge how they will feel when they return to college, and a swift return does not necessarily mean that a student will not need support.

The amount of compassionate leave granted will be at the discretion of a member of the Student Services leadership team taking into account the circumstances of the case and the impact on the student's welfare and future academic success.

Extended compassionate leave will be considered, for example in cases where students may have to travel significant distances to attend a funeral, when caring for a terminally ill immediate family member or for religious observance which may extend the mourning period.

5. Other special leave

Special leave is at the discretion of the college and permission must be sought from the Principal, as soon as possible in advance of booking/arranging the leave. This must be done by completing a special leave request form, which can be requested from a student's Progress Mentor.

Unauthorised leave is when permission has not been granted or when leave is taken without a request being submitted. Any student who takes unauthorised leave may face formal disciplinary action in line with the college's Positive Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedures. Please refer to this policy for full details

Possible reasons for requesting special leave are below, though this is not an exhaustive list.

Weddings/Graduation or similar ceremony of an immediate relative

It is unlikely that more than one day's leave for weddings or graduation ceremonies will be granted unless there are extenuating circumstances.

If more than one day's leave is required then a special leave request form must be submitted as described above. Evidence such as an invitation or confirmation of attendance must be provided along with the completed form.

Part-time work and work-related activities

College work must take priority over part-time work and students must arrange any part-time work, or work-related activity, e.g. induction days/training outside of the college core day. A college core day is defined as Monday to Friday 8:45am to 3:55pm.

Blackpool Sixth does not permit leave for part-time work.

Evening and weekend part-time work has benefits to students in terms of additional finance and an opportunity to further develop the essential skills that future employers value, such as communication skills, team working skills, and problem-solving. Research has shown that part-time work can also improve the academic performance of students - but only if they are working no more than twelve hours per week. Working more than twelve hours per week has a significant negative effect on their performance at college.

We strongly recommend, therefore, that students should not take on more than twelve hours of part-time work per week during term time.

Work experience

Work experience gives students a valuable insight into their chosen career and the experience needed to improve their chances of making successful job applications in the future.

Students are free to arrange their own placements but they need to first contact the Futures Team before making any arrangements to ensure that the placement does not take priority over college studies and all essential health and safety arrangements have been made. Parents/carers will be required to sign a consent form.

The Futures Team will support students in sourcing and arranging relevant and high quality work experience.

Any work-related activity that supports a student's career aim may be considered as special leave. However, any application must include a letter from the employer, together with an explanation of the benefits of taking the leave.

Extra-curricular representation

Any extra-curricular activity that supports a student's career aim, or involves significant personal achievement, may be considered as special leave. Examples include one off sporting events or participation in performing arts, if the student is participating at the equivalent of county level or above. Any application must include a letter from the performing arts/sports body as evidence, together with an explanation of the benefits of taking the leave.

Other circumstances

Special leave requests will be considered for extenuating circumstances not covered by this policy. Any requests for special leave in other circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be taken into consideration alongside current attendance levels and the impact on studies and progression.

6. Procedure for requesting special leave

Requests for special leave must be made as soon as possible in advance of booking/arranging the leave. This must be done by completing a special leave request form, which can be requested from a student's Progress Mentor. Requests received within 10 college days before the leave is due to start may not be considered and the leave, if taken, will be unauthorised.

Requests for special leave must include additional evidence in support of the request, for example official notifications/booking forms/letters/invites/medical evidence etc.

Once a request for special leave is made, we aim to send an initial response within 5 college days confirming receipt of the request and explaining the next steps.

A decision on whether the leave will be granted will usually be taken within 10 college days. This decision will be confirmed in a letter to the student and their parent(s)/carer(s).

Where special leave is granted, conditions/expectations will be made clear to minimise impact on a student's progress. These will be confirmed in writing as part of the letter in response to an approved special leave request. Conditions/expectations may include:

- A minimum attendance expectation in advance of the period of leave
- Requirement to be up to date with all work in advance
- Requirement to attend additional sessions in advance, or after, the period of leave
- A willingness to complete work during the period of leave and submit this upon return to college
- In exceptional circumstances and where practically possible a requirement to attend 'live' lessons remotely via Google Meet during the period of leave

Failure to meet these conditions/expectations will result in the leave being considered to be unauthorised and as such be treated as misconduct. Any student in this situation may face formal disciplinary action in line with the college's Positive Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedures. Please refer to this policy for full details.

A student has the right to appeal against a decision to deny a request for special leave, if the original request was received more than 10 college days before the leave is due to start. Students and parents/carers will be informed of this right. The three reasons for appeal are:

- did not follow college procedures
- did not take account of the evidence provided, or new evidence is available.
- showed bias or discrimination in reaching a judgement.

If a student wishes to appeal, they must do so in writing to the Assistant Principal for Student Support within 5 college days of notification of the decision.

An appeal hearing will usually be held within 5 college days of receipt of the request. The student will be informed in writing of the date, time and place of the appeal hearing. If the student requests extra time to prepare their case, the hearing may be put back for a period not longer than 5 college days.

A student has the right to be accompanied to the appeal hearing by a parent/carer. At the appeal hearing, the student will have the opportunity to present their case and provide any supporting evidence.

A student will be informed in writing of the outcome of his/her appeal within 5 college days of the appeal hearing.

7. Unauthorised leave

Unauthorised leave is when:

- leave is taken following a request being denied
- leave is taken without a request being submitted according to the guidelines above
- a student fails, without good reason, to meet the conditions/expectations of an approved special leave request

Any student who takes unauthorised leave may face formal disciplinary action in line with the college's Positive Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedures. Please refer to this policy for full details.

8. Review

The content and operation of this policy will be reviewed every two years by the Head of Student Services and the Senior Leadership Team.