



Department of Higher Education and Training
123 Frances Baard Street, Pretoria

Public Further Education and Training College Attendance and Punctuality Policy

1. Introduction

The Department of Higher Education and Training recognizes the positive correlation between class attendance and both student retention and achievement. Any class session or activity missed, regardless of cause, reduces the opportunity for learning and may adversely affect a student's achievement in the course.

Levels of attendance have a direct impact on the success of our students. Students are more likely to complete and achieve their qualification if they attend classes regularly. Students who arrive late have an impact not just on their own learning but also on the progress of the rest of the class. Similarly, employers set high expectations of attendance and punctuality in the workplace.

The Department therefore expects public Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges to set and enforce, and our students to comply with high levels of attendance and punctuality to improve students' chances for success and prepare them for the professional culture of the workplace.

2. Principles

- The expectation is for students to be 100% 'present' at all scheduled classes. The focus is on 'presence' rather than absence.
- Students should know their own attendance levels and the regular review and reporting of attendance must be part of the student monitoring process. The measure of attendance will be 'present'.

- To reduce the amount of time students are not in class, either from sickness or other reasons, there will be regular and consistent processes put in place by college management to monitor, follow up and report on attendance.
- Students will be expected to explain in person the reason for their absence and the authorisation of absences will be limited to specific situations.
- There will be clear consequences for students whose attendance falls below agreed levels.
- Attendance monitoring is part of the college quality processes. Responsibility for achieving high levels of attendance lies with FET College Principals.
- FET College Principals must ensure that all classes are delivered and students have the opportunity to attend all classes.

3. Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties or Other Support Needs

If a student has a disability or medical difficulty that directly affects their attendance or ability to arrive on time, this should be identified with the student and Student Support Services, and formally recorded on the student record card at the start of the academic year or at the time of the incident. Colleges will work with the student to ensure that reasonable adjustments and support is put in place and levels of expectation are set accordingly. Any reviews or disciplinary actions will take into account and be responsive to the needs of students with disabilities, learning difficulties or other emotional, social or behavioural needs. Support will be offered and provided where appropriate.

4. Expectations of College Staff and Students

Quality improvement is the responsibility of college lecturers as well as programme managers. The actions required by college staff and students to improve attendance and punctuality are specified below.

College Staff is expected to:

- Communicate clearly the Department's expectations that students are to be present in 100% of classes and to arrive before the start of class ready to learn. It is recommended that students sign a code of conduct document at the start of the academic year which includes a commitment to attend class and be punctual.
- Consistently reinforce the message that poor attendance or punctuality is not acceptable and where it falls below an agreed level this will lead to action, including possible disciplinary action, cancellation of entry to a final examination or even exclusion.
- Provide students with clear instructions on how to communicate their intended absence.
- Accurately and fully complete each class register by the end of each session.
- Ensure that when a student returns, they complete a Student Absence Form to be signed by the lecturer which is processed and filed with the class register. Attendance should only be 'authorised' for absences agreed in advance or for exceptional personal circumstances. Sickness without a medical/registered traditional healer's certificate is not authorised but must be marked as sickness on the Student Absence Form.
- Engage any student who arrives 10 minutes after the stipulated starting time of the class and record this student on the attendance register as being late and follow this up with the student after the class has finished. Lateness must be recorded in the register with an 'L'. Late students should not be excluded from the class unless it affects health and safety or disrupts the class.
- Ensure that attendance and lateness is monitored weekly by a specific member of the college staff and the consequences as given below are followed.
- Openly and regularly discuss the trends in attendance and lateness levels of a group or individual students in class sessions.
- Directly address issues of attendance and punctuality in individual progress reviews as well as to set and monitor targets for improvement.
- Regularly obtain attendance reports for each group and discuss trends and concerns with other lecturers, programme and academic managers.

Students are expected to:

- Ensure that they attend all classes and arrive before the start of the class properly equipped and prepared to participate in the session.
- Inform their lecturer in person before the start of class or by an agreed contact route, if they have genuine reasons for lateness or absence.
- Understand the expectations of attendance, the levels at which follow up action will happen and what the consequences will be.
- Always schedule medical and other appointments out of College hours where possible.
- Not take on work commitments that clash with scheduled class times at the college. Any absence for work will constitute unauthorised absence.
- Commit to complete outstanding work as homework from classes missed due to poor punctuality or attendance.

5. Consequences

The level for measuring attendance will be the 'present' level. Where absence is unauthorised the following 3 stages of follow up are proposed:

Stage 1 Formal Warning

- This can be issued by the lecturer where there are concerns about attendance. There should be no more than 3 formal warnings before moving to stage 2.

Stage 2 Formal Absence Review Meeting with lecturer and programme manager (plus disciplinary warning if appropriate) where:

- Attendance: Below 80% 'present', or absent one or more sessions in a week or 4 or more absences in any 4 week period.
- Lateness: late twice in a week or more than 5 times in any 4 week period or other patterns of lateness.
- Patterns of absence, e.g. every Monday, every Friday, specific lessons, etc. or sickness occurring on a regular basis.
- Unauthorised absences could lead to NSFAS payments, where applicable, being stopped for the rest of the term/trimester.

- The review meeting should discuss reasons for absence, and decided on support where required and methods to catch up on missed work. The review meeting should result in an action plan which is agreed to by the student.
- There should be no more than 2 formal absence review meetings before moving to stage 3.

Stage 3 Formal Hearing with academic manager

- Attendance: Continued 'present' rate of less than 80%, persistent lateness or failure to improve despite warnings or absence reviews.
- If a second formal hearing for poor attendance or punctuality is held, this can lead to final written warning.
- Should a student fail to comply after the final written warning, this could lead to the cancellation of entry to a final examination or exclusion.

Where attendance is affected by authorised absence, it is still necessary to address the matter directly with the student and institute the above processes where a trend of absence emerges and exceeds 20% of the class time at any given time in the programme.

6. General Actions for Lecturing Staff

- Where appropriate parents/employers should be involved to address issues of attendance and punctuality, and it is imperative for them to receive information on attendance and punctuality the moment it becomes a concern.
- Ensure that classes start promptly and finish as timetabled. Lecturers should be in the room before the start of class ready to start at the scheduled time. Classes should start on time even if there are students who may arrive late.
- Students should not be excluded from classes due to lateness unless there is a very good reason, for example health and safety or the level of disruption.
- Ensure that class attendance is enhanced by good practice in teaching and learning. This may include a variety of activities that engage students in challenging and interesting tasks, use of a variety of teaching styles and formative assessment feedback.

- Emphasise motivational factors such as career progression routes, expectations of employers, the value of the final qualification in the job market or progression to Higher Education, in order to maintain the students' interest and determination to achieve.

7. Authorised Absence

An absence can only be authorised where:

- It is agreed in advance with a college lecturer.
- Every attempt has been made to schedule external appointments outside of college times.

Authorised absences may include:

- Sickness supported by a medical/registered traditional healer's certificate
- Medical/registered traditional healer's appointments
- Court appearances
- Work or Higher Education interviews
- Appointments with government or voluntary organisations
- Funerals
- Religious holidays
- Driving Tests
- Curriculum agreed external events or work placements

An absence can be authorised by a college lecturer for exceptional and unavoidable personal circumstances or by agreement with an appropriate programme manager.

8. Examinations

A student shall be allowed to write the examination for every subject for which he/she has attained a minimum of 80% attendance (including authorised absence and sickness) per subject.

Colleges will be required to verify and provide attendance information to the Department before the release of examination entry permits to students at the start of an examination session. A student may not be given access to the examination room without this permit.

9. National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) Payments

In terms of the Department's FET College Bursary Guidelines, the disbursement of tuition, travel and accommodation allowances is intended to promote student attendance and ensure student academic performance. Paragraph 17 of the Guideline states that allowances must be disbursed in tranches after thorough analysis of student attendance.

In order to ensure that the tuition, travel and accommodation allowances serve the purpose for which they are intended, it is imperative that the Department regulates the disbursement of these allowances to students.

NSFAS tuition, travel and accommodation disbursements can only be made to students if they have a minimum of 80% attendance (including authorised absence and sickness) for classes.

If days or periods of sickness are occurring regularly and affecting progress in a course or if a lecturer suspects that sickness without a medical certificate/registered traditional healer's certificate may not be genuine, then the lecturer can call the student to an absence review meeting and if appropriate stop NSFAS disbursements to the student. NSFAS disbursements to a student must be reviewed if any absence including authorised absence by a student lasts longer than one week.