



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE BIRMINGHAM
CODE OF PRACTICE ON LEAVE OF ABSENCE
PROCEDURES

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1. Introduction

- 1.1** During their period of registration, Students may experience a range of significant challenges that may compromise their ability to attend and continue to fully engage with their programme of study.
- 1.2** This Code of Practice applies to all Students undertaking Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes.
- 1.3** Leave of Absence is not an automatic entitlement and therefore it may be refused depending upon the circumstances and the evidence provided. It may also be imposed by the University rather than requested by the Student.
- 1.4** Code of Practice on Leave of Absence does not apply for Apprenticeship students in the same way. Apprenticeship students must apply for Leave of Absence (deferral) through their employer and Centre for Apprenticeships team, an exception would be required for Degree Apprenticeship programmes with the School Assistant Dean also confirming the Leave of Absence (deferral).

2. Definition of Leave of Absence

- 2.1** Leave of Absence is a recognised and authorised break from studies where there is no academic engagement. It should not be sought as a means to extend study periods and the decision should not be taken lightly because of the wider implications.
- 2.2** Leave of Absence may also be referred to as a deferral.
- 2.3** Leave of Absence should not be used as a short-term solution where an alternative option, such as apply for Extenuating Circumstances, would be more beneficial to the academic progress of the Student.
- 2.4** Leave of Absence will normally only be given for a period of either one semester or one academic year.
- 2.5** A Student must apply for Leave of Absence at the time the situation arises that adversely impacts on their ability to study.

3. Implications of a Leave of Absence

- 3.1** The Student's registration status will be recorded as deferred for the duration of the Leave of Absence.
- 3.2** a) Tuition fees will be adjusted to take account of the period of Leave of Absence.
b) The employer apprenticeship programme fees would be suspended during the period of Leave of Absence (deferral).

- 3.3** There will be an impact upon Student funding provision i.e. payments via Student loans and scholarships.
- 3.4** The University is required by law to withdraw immigration sponsorship for Students taking Leave of Absence who have entered the UK on a Tier 4 Student visa. This will normally mean that they will be required to leave the UK for their period of Leave of Absence (as will any of their dependants). Therefore, International Students should seek advice from The International Office regarding the impact of a Leave of Absence on their immigration status. The Student should also note that they would have to apply for a new visa so seek advice from The International Office.
- 3.5** a) Although there is technically still a connection with the University, there is no active Student registration status for this period of absence, thus having other outcomes such as no access to University provision (teaching, tutorials, supervision, accommodation and associated facilities)
b) An apprentice remains employed during the agreed academic leave of absence (deferral) and will need to ensure that prior to the agreed return from leave of absence formal contact is made with the Centre for Apprenticeships.
- 3.6** Any pre-existing University processes, (such as investigations into plagiarism, fitness to practise, misconduct etc.) will normally continue during any approved Leave of Absence.
- 3.7** For entrants to the University from 2016/17 onwards, in accordance with Regulation 2.2.1 g), all time spent on Leave of Absence for Students on taught programmes is excluded from the calculation of the maximum period of registration. For taught Students who entered the University in 2015/16 or earlier, the maximum periods of study as stated in the Regulations in 2014/15 apply and time spent on Leave of Absence will be included when calculating the maximum period of registration.

4. Categories of Voluntary Leave of Absence

- 4.1** Leave of Absence covers both medical and non-medical circumstances.
- 4.2** Medical
All Leaves of Absence which are categorised as being for 'Medical' reasons require medical evidence to be submitted at the time of applying for the Leave of Absence. The University reserves the right to request permission to contact the relevant medical professional for additional information where appropriate.
- 4.3** Non-Medical
Non-Medical categories of Leave of Absence are as follows, and Students must provide the necessary supporting evidence.

- a) **Maternity Leave/ Paternity Leave/ Adoption Leave**
For Maternity Leave, statutory guidelines must be followed. As early as possible in the pregnancy, Students are advised to discuss with an appropriate member of staff the most appropriate options for supporting them through their pregnancy.
- b) **Financial Hardship**
The financial situation of the Student means that they cannot continue with study at this time.
- c) **Transfer of programme**
This category should be used to reflect situations where Students will be transferring to a new programme of study but where it is too late in the current academic year to start their new programme. (This category is not applicable to Apprenticeship Students).
- d) **Placements**
This category should be used where a Student undertakes a placement or internship which is not an integral and assessed part of their programme. (This category is not applicable to Apprenticeship Students).
- e) **Competitive Sports**
This category should be used where a Student needs to take a Leave of Absence to compete at International level without disadvantaging their studies. (This category is not applicable to Apprenticeship Students).
- f) **Other (including personal reasons)**
The reasons for Leave of Absence arising from situations such as family bereavement and other personal circumstances must be specified and evidenced.

5. Categories of Compulsory Leave of Absence

5.1 In certain situations, a Student may be put on Leave of Absence by the University without the Student submitting a Leave of Absence request.

- a) Suspension following an Academic Misconduct or Fitness to Practise Hearing the Relevant University Committee may apply a penalty of suspension not exceeding one year.

6. Evidence requirements

6.1 All Leave of Absence requests should be accompanied by appropriate third party supporting evidence.

6.2 Leave of Absence on appropriately evidenced medical grounds will usually be authorised providing that the evidence is acceptable. Where relevant a translation in English must be provided.

6.3 Examples of acceptable evidence for non-medical requests include death certificates for bereavement, crime numbers for victims of crime situations, medical evidence relating to serious illness in the immediate family and copies of bank statements for financial hardship.

6.4 Examples of unacceptable reasons for requesting Leave of Absence include problems with equipment or technology, lost work, travel difficulties, holidays or moving house.

6.5 For Apprenticeship Students all leave of absence requests must be accompanied by evidence of employer agreement to the duration of the leave of absence.

7. Alternatives to Leave of Absence

Possible alternatives to Leave of Absence are:

7.1 Switch to part time study if appropriate (see your Assistant Dean for further advice); (This category is not applicable to Apprenticeship Students).

7.2 If it is short-term look at completing an Extenuating Circumstances application.

8. Processing a Leave of Absence application

8.1 The list of Assistant Deans, who are authorised signatories for Leave of Absence applications, must be notified to the Registry at the start of the academic year.

8.2 The application form should be downloaded from the UCB website or Portal as and when they are required to ensure that the correct version of the application form is being submitted.

8.3 The application form must be submitted to the Registry alongside the relevant evidence in a timely manner. Where evidence is not included, the reasons for this should be provided and the Assistant Dean supporting/not supporting the request without evidence.

8.4 Leave of Absence forms may be submitted in hard copy to the Registry or electronically but must include the Student's signature.

8.5 The Registry administrator and an appropriate Assistant Dean (or nominee) will consider the application and aim to respond in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the application and may:

- a) Approve the application; or
- b) Reject the application giving full reasons for the decision.

- 8.6** Once processed, all authorised Leave of Absence forms will be recorded in Registry and the relevant members of UCB staff and the Student will be notified. The Student will be notified of the approved Leave of Absence by post or e-mail and of the process that is to be followed in order to return to their studies at the relevant time. Also notification on Portal will be posted under Comments section
- 8.7** a) It is the Student's responsibility to inform their Student Finance England of their confirmed Leave of Absence. FISU will update the Student's record and recalculate the tuition fees due up to the last date of attendance. They will then notify Student Finance England and the Student of the amended fee. The Student will also be informed of the tuition fee due on their subsequent return to study.
- b) The Centre for Apprenticeships will update the Student's record and recalculate the training and assessment fees to be paid by the employer or funding agency where necessary. A new planned end for the Apprenticeship programme will be notified to the Apprentice and employer.
- 8.8** The University will normally report to the Home Office the withdrawal of immigration sponsorship of a Tier 4 Student Visa holder that is on Leave of Absence. Student status will be suspended for them whilst on the Leave of Absence.
- 8.9** Any grades/credits achieved at the point of deferral will stand.

9. Return from Leave of Absence

- 9.1** Before the Student is due to return a reminder will be sent out by the Student Records team.
- 9.2** At the end of the period of Leave of Absence, it is the responsibility of the Student to notify UCB of their intention to return to their programme of study by the channels indicated in the deferral confirmation letter.
- 9.3** Students returning must be mindful that there can be no guarantee that the modules and programme remaining for study will be available in the same way as would have been had the Leave of Absence not occurred. It may be that some modules are not available in a particular semester, or that they may have been replaced or revised. This may mean that a Student may need to take longer to complete their programme than might otherwise be expected.
- 9.4** Student's returning from a Leave of Absence do not have the right to resubmit or resit assessments undertaken prior to the period of deferral, unless specified in the letter from Registry.
- 9.5** If a Student is returning to study following suspension imposed as a penalty the Student will be permitted to return at the end of the period of suspension subject

to any conditions that may have been imposed.

10. Failure to Return from a Leave of Absence

10.1 If the Student decides not to return following a period of Leave of Absence, they must notify the Student Records team in writing that they wish to withdraw from the programme of study. Where applicable formal confirmation of the Student's achievement up to the point of deferral will be issued. This may take the form of a transcript, notification of performance or an award.

10.2 A Student will be deemed to have withdrawn from the University if he/she does not return to study or their employed apprenticeship status by the approved end date of the Leave of Absence and has not applied for an extension to it.

11. Refused Leave of Absence

11.1 Permission for a Leave of Absence will not normally be granted if:

- a) Less than half of the teaching weeks on a module remain
- b) It would be reasonably expected that a dissertation or equivalent would be substantially completed.

11.2 Where a Leave of Absence is not approved, the Student will be expected to attend their programme of study. In some cases, Leave of Absence that was originally refused will be subsequently approved following submission of additional information and/or supporting evidence.

11.3 Complaints and appeals relating to decisions on Leave of Absence may be made through the Assessment Appeals Procedure.

12. Extension to Leave of Absence

12.1 Leave of Absence will normally be approved for a maximum period of twelve months. If a Student is unable to return to studies at the end of the Leave of Absence, they will need to apply for an extension by completing a new form and providing new evidence. This may not be approved as it may not be in the best interest of the Student.

12.2 If an apprenticeship student is unable to return to their apprenticeship programme at the end of the leave of absence (deferral) they will be required to attend a meeting with their employer and UCB representative to determine the commitment to the programme. Leave of Absence over a period of twelve months is not usually accepted unless in exceptional circumstances and is at the discretion of the Director of Apprenticeships.

13. Extensions to Study Periods

13.1 Students are expected to complete their Award within the prescribed maximum period of study as set out in Regulation 2.2

13.2 Periods of study where a Student has been granted a Leave of Absence are excluded from this maximum time.

13.3 Application for an extension to the maximum period of study should be submitted at least two months before the expiry of the maximum period of study or as early as possible before the deadline.

13.4 An extension to maximum period of study is considered exceptional, rather than the norm and is not a right so may be refused depending upon the circumstances. These circumstances include not being able to provide sufficient evidence or sufficient details. For Apprenticeship students this would also require the employer to agree to any further extension.

13.5 Poor academic progress is in itself not reasonable grounds for an extension.

13.6 Reasons that may be approved are:

- a) Accidents
- b) Bereavement of an immediate family member
- c) Serious ill health
- d) Serious illness affecting an immediate family member
- e) Serious unforeseen events or personal difficulties
- f) Unexpected serious financial hardship

13.7 Reasons that may not be approved are:

- a) Work commitments
- b) Unrealistic time plan
- c) Holidays or periods of absence taken earlier
- d) Improve language skills
- e) Requests in excess of 12 months

13.8 All applications must be accompanied with appropriate supporting evidence.

13.9 Evidence in a language other than English should be translated and certified.

13.10 The form and evidence must be supplied to Registry as stated in 13.3. Registry will aim to respond in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the form.

13.11 An application for extension to a study period must be approved by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum and Student Experience) or their nominee.