

Institute of Dentistry: Absent Students Policy

Prepared by Dominic Hurst | Academic Lead for Student Support

With input from: Rob Allaker, Paul Anderson, Jason Berry, John Buchanan, Sinclair Butcher, Alan Cruchley, Lorna Ireland, Sarah Murray, Mangala Patel, Amitha Ranauta, Simon Rawlinson, Paul Smallcombe, Fiona Whelan, Shabana Younas.

June 2020 v7

1 Background

- 1.1 This policy seeks to advise staff what to do when has been out of attendance without explanation.
- 1.2 Should students be absent without an explanation, this could give rise to **concerns about their health and / or safety, professional capability or engagement** with their respective programme.
- 1.3 The policy aims to **identify the responsibilities of the Institute of Dentistry**, and **individual roles within it**, in relation to the student and the steps that should be taken to attempt to contact them and, if possible, support their return to studies.
- 1.4 This policy also sets out **for students** the expectations of the Institute of Dentistry regarding their attendance as well as expectations about communicating non-attendance with the Institute of Dentistry.

2 Explanations of terminology

- 2.1 Several terms are used for different roles in this document. For reference, this terminology is explained below.
- 2.2 “Staff” refers to all academic and professional services staff working in the IoD and QMUL.

- 2.3 “Year Lead” refers to the year leads for the BDS and BSc programmes only.
- 2.4 “Programme Lead” refers to either the lead for the CCFS, MSc or DClintDent programme.
- In relation to an individual student, the relevant Programme Lead is the lead of their programme.
- 2.5 “Supervisor” refers to the individual(s) supervising any MSc, DClintDent or PhD research.
- 2.6 “Session tutor” refers to a member of staff (academic or professional services) who is running a specific timetabled session.
- 2.7 “Student Support Office” refers to the team of academic and professional services staff that run the Student Support Office. At the time of writing, this consists of an Academic Lead for Student Support, a Senior Tutor for Student Support, a Student Support Officer and a Student Support Administrator.
- 2.8 “Director of Graduate Studies” refers to the individual overseeing the PhD programmes.
- 2.9 “Directors of Undergraduate Dental Education” refers to the individuals overseeing the BDS, BSc and Diploma programmes.
- 2.10 “Head of Taught Programmes” refers to the individual overseeing the CCFS, undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.

2.11 “Taught students” refers to any student on the following programmes: CCFS, Diploma, BSc, BDS and MSc. Although a level 8 degree, the DClinDent for the purposes of this document are classified as taught students.

2.12 “Research students” refers to PhD students only.

3 Attendance

3.1 In determining when to raise concerns about a student being absent, it is necessary first to outline expectations about attendance.

3.2 All students registered on the CCFS, BDS, BSc Oral Health or Diploma in Hygiene-Therapy, DClinDent, MSc or PhD programmes (from now on referred to as ‘students’) are training for a professional qualification that **requires full competency and knowledge in the teaching and learning objectives delivered throughout their programmes.**

3.3 Taught students are expected to attend all timetabled teaching (small group and lectures), clinical sessions, and any other timetabled activity. This may be in person or online.

3.4 **Research students** are expected to **devote their full attention to their research** and **related training programme**, attending regularly and maintaining close contact with their supervisors, unless involved in research in the field or overseas.

4 Reporting absence

- 4.1 Students are informed that it is their responsibility to keep the Institute of Dentistry informed of any absence from the Institute of Dentistry, due to illness or other circumstance.
- 4.2 If they are absent from planned teaching, research activities or research training programme students should:
- 4.3 Notify by email the **Student Support Office** with the **reasons** for the absence.
- 4.4 Notify by email their Year / Programme Lead / Supervisor and relevant session tutor of their absence only, copying in the Student Support Office.
- 4.5 Students are not required to give their reasons for absence to anyone other than the Student Support Office. This is to ensure students' personal information is kept confidential within the Student Support Office by default. This does not prevent a student disclosing their reasons should they wish to but staff outside of the Student Support Office should not ask for it.
- 4.6 Students are required to **notify the Student Support Office** if they are **unable to attend any assessment** or **submit work for assessment**, with an extenuating circumstances form and appropriate evidence.

- 4.7 Students are requested to **notify the Student Support Office** if they need to be absent from the programme for **compassionate leave**, for example, where there has been a family bereavement.
- 4.8 Students may seek permission from the Student Support Office for **unusual leave of absence**. The balance between the period of absence requested, the impact of lost study time and the student's academic standing will be considered in making the decision.
- 4.9 Students, by nature of their enrolment, can be expected to **uphold high standards of academic diligence and professional behaviour**. Absence from the programme without notification or explanation will therefore give the Institute of Dentistry **cause for concern about the wellbeing** and/or **professional capability** of the student.
- 4.10 The absence of the student from the Institute of Dentistry may also give rise to **concerns about the student's safety**. These concerns may be particularly acute if it is known that the student is suffering from a health or mental health problem.
- 4.11 The **UK Visa and Immigration** has expectations of international students with regard to attendance as part of the **Tier 4** of the points-based system. Absence from the programme for a prolonged period may result in **de-registration** and a student's **visa being withdrawn**.

5 Confidentiality and Data Protection

- 5.1 Some students do not wish to have contact with their immediate family for personal reasons and, as they are adults (aged 18 or over), this position must be respected.
- 5.2 For the Student Support Office to contact a student's next of kin or any third party and disclose information about them may be considered a breach of data protection legislation. However, according to the General Data Protection Regulation, it is possible to process personal data, including about health, without the consent of the data subject when it is with **the intention of protecting the vital interests of that data subject or another person**. As such, where the Institute of Dentistry is **concerned that the student is at risk of psychological or physical harm or death**, the **Institute of Dentistry may consider it appropriate to contact their next of kin or named third party** (see below), preferably following written or verbal notice that it may do so.
- 5.3 At the start of each academic year, **students who do not wish the Institute of Dentistry to contact their next of kin** will have the option to provide details of a named contact whom they would be happy for the Institute of Dentistry to contact should a concern be raised about them. This option will be communicated by email. **Students can inform the SSO of any changes to this named contact at any time.**

6 Indications for concern

- 6.1 Underlying this policy is the understanding that students are responsible adults who will **adhere to the Institute of Dentistry's attendance and absence policies**. Therefore, where **a student fails to attend teaching**, placements or other timetabled activity **without explanation**, this should automatically give reason for concern.
- 6.2 Indicators for concern may be:
- 6.2.1 Unexplained absence from one or more consecutive seminars.
 - 6.2.2 Unexplained non-engagement with timetabled online learning.
 - 6.2.3 Unexplained absence from clinical practice for one or more sessions.
 - 6.2.4 Unexplained absence from one or more consecutive in-course assessments.
 - 6.2.5 Failure to attend or respond to one or more appointments with appropriate members of staff (namely Student Support Office staff, Year Lead, Programme Lead, Supervisor(s)) when unexplained absence has been identified.
 - 6.2.6 Failure to respond to emails to their college email address from appropriate staff (namely Student Support Office staff, Year Lead, Programme Lead, Supervisor(s)) when unexplained absence has been identified.

7 Procedures for managing student absence

- 7.1 The respective **Year Lead (Diploma, BSc, BDS), Programme Lead (CCFS, PGT)** and **Director of Graduate Studies (PGR)** oversee the initial management of students who are not attending timetabled teaching / research.
- 7.2 **All staff have a responsibility to share concerns** about absence with the respective Year / Programme Lead / Director of Graduate Studies.
- 7.3 The **Year Lead / Programme Lead / Director of Graduate Studies** should check with the **Student Support Office** to see if there is **any information to explain** the student's absence such as an interruption of studies.
- 7.4 If no such information exists, the relevant **Year Lead / Programme Lead / Director of Graduate Studies** should **make further attempts** to contact the student via the following methods, in the order indicated and including the information that follows:
 - 7.4.1 Email to QMUL email address.
 - 7.4.2 Email to personal email address, if available on Mysis.

7.4.3 If the student doesn't respond to the email within a short period of time (depending on the situation, this could be 24 hours or several days), a **phone call** to their listed phone numbers (available from Mysis/SITS). A message can be left but this should simply ask the student to contact the relevant **Year Lead / Programme Lead / Director of Graduate Studies** and not mention any reasons. This is in case the message is picked up by a third party. **Next of kin should not be contacted.** The Student Support Office keeps a record of who students would want to be contacted should they go missing as this may not be their next of kin.

7.5 The following should be explained to the student if contact is made with them:

7.5.1 That the Institute of Dentistry is **concerned they have been absent.**

7.5.2 Reminding them of their **responsibility to contact the Institute of Dentistry** to explain their absence.

7.5.3 Requesting them to **contact the Institute of Dentistry** to explain their absence.

7.5.4 Reminding them that **support is available** from the Student Support Office if needed.

7.5.5 That continued **failure to respond will result in the concern being escalated** to the Directors of Undergraduate Dental Education (Diploma, BSc, BDS), Head of Taught Programmes (CCFS, MSc, DClindent) or Research Degrees Progression and Examinations Board (PhD).

- 7.6 If no response is received to these attempts to contact the student, it can be considered that the **student is at risk** and the **Academic Lead** (Dominic Hurst) or **Senior Tutor** (Mangala Patel) **for Student Support** or the **Student Support Officer** (Becky Hunter) **should be informed immediately.**
- 7.7 The **Student Support Office** should continue to **make attempts to contact the student** via the following methods, in the order indicated:
- 7.7.1 Contacting known friends or tutor group members of the student to ask if they know where they are and can pass on a message to contact the Student Support Office. **Minimal information should be shared in doing this.** E.g. avoid saying that the SSO is concerned about the student's wellbeing and just ask them to ask the student to get in touch with the SSO.
- 7.7.2 Contacting the student's next of kin or named contact. **The SSO must check whether the student has indicated they wish a named contact rather than next of kin to be contacted** and this choice respected.
- 7.7.3 Letter to registered term-time and home address
- 7.8 The letter should detail:
- 7.8.1 The Institute of Dentistry's **concern about their absence.**

- 7.8.2 Their responsibility to inform the Institute of Dentistry of any absence from the programme.
- 7.8.3 A warning that continued unexplained absence may result in their de-registration from the programme.
- 7.8.4 Advice about the support available from the Student Support Office.
- 7.9 Communication with the student's named contact should be **from the Student Support Office** and should only **disclose the minimum amount of information necessary** to establish the student's whereabouts and/or inform them of the Institute of Dentistry's concern. This discussion should be fully documented in Co-Tutor.
- 7.10 Once the **student's named contact has been informed** of the Institute of Dentistry's concerns about the missing student, the **Academic Lead for Student Support will inform** the Directors of Undergraduate Dental Education / Programme Lead / Director of Graduate Studies / Head of Taught Programmes.
- 7.11 If the student continues to be absent from the programme, **the student may be deregistered** from the programme by the Directors of Undergraduate Dental Education / Programme Lead / Director of Graduate Studies / Head of Taught Programmes and the relationship with the Institute of Dentistry and QMUL will be terminated.

- 7.12 For taught students, the **Director of Taught Programmes** is responsible for **notifying the Registry Services Manager** when an **international student continues to be absent** from the programme, within 10 weeks from notification of the initial concern.
- 7.13 For research students, the **Director of Graduate Studies** is responsible for **notifying the Registry Services Manager** when an **international student continues to be absent** from the programme, within 10 weeks from notification of the initial concern.
- 7.14 If the student **regains contact with the Institute of Dentistry**, the Directors of Undergraduate Dental Education / Programme Lead / Head of Taught Programmes will consider, with the Academic Lead for Student Support, their ability to continue the programme, any extenuating circumstances and, whether a referral to the Professional Capability Committee is required.
- 7.15 For PGR students, consideration should be given to a retrospective application for interruption of studies to the Research Degrees Progression and Examinations Board (RDPEB). The Director of Graduate Studies should oversee this.
- 7.16 If the student **regains contact with the Institute of Dentistry after de-registration** and they wish to continue, a formal appeal to the university must be made.

8 Action to be taken when a student informs the Institute of Dentistry of concern about a missing student.

- 8.1 If a student contacts the Institute of Dentistry with concerns about a missing colleague, the matter should be referred to the **Year / Programme Lead / Director of Graduate Studies** for action and escalation as per [section 7](#).

-END-

