



# The Church of Scotland

## **Faith Nurture Forum – Initial Ministerial Education (IME) Student Policy**

### **Sickness Absence**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Faith Nurture Forum of the Church of Scotland (Faith Nurture Forum) recognises that few individuals will go through their student life without becoming ill or having some sort of injury which requires them to take time off from their studies. Faith Nurture Forum appreciates this, is sympathetic to students who are unwell and is committed to supporting students wherever possible to return to good health.

Faith Nurture Forum has a responsibility to ensure that those participating in the IME Programme and preparing for Ministry within the Church of Scotland fulfil the requirements of the programme and student attendance is a critical factor.

There may be other circumstances where students are unable to attend studies e.g. carer responsibilities, pregnancy, emergency domestic situations and you should refer to the appropriate policy or speak to Faith Nurture Forum who will advise.

#### **2. Purpose and Scope**

This policy describes the standards, responsibilities, and procedures governing the management of sick absence. The procedures are designed to help and encourage students to achieve and maintain acceptable standards of attendance.

The underlying aims are to:

- ensure fair and consistent treatment for all students;
- ensure that all students are aware of their role in maintaining good attendance;
- help students experiencing problems to get their attendance back to an acceptable level;
- ensure all Faith Nurture Forum staff and students are aware of the support services available to support attendance;
- support students who are absent due to sickness to return to normal working;
- ensure any actions/decisions taken relating to attendance comply with the Equality Act 2010.

The university at which you are studying will have in place a student attendance or student absence policy and you are expected to comply with this when you are a candidate. This policy only applies to those students who are on placement (candidates or probationers).

Further guidance is provided in Appendix 2 for students with a disability who are absent through sickness.

### **3. Responsibilities**

Students should:

- Attend all placements, unless unfit to do so;
- Investigate alternative arrangements to compensate for missed work;
- Ensure that proper notifications when unwell are made in line with this policy;
- Ensure that when they return, they complete the student absence return form;
- Take personal responsibility for their health.

Faith Nurture Forum will:

- Monitor and record absence for all students within the scope of this policy;
- Carry out student absence returns in good time, logging the form and returning a copy to the student for their own records;
- Report on absence statistics as required by the Faith Nurture Forum Convenor and Secretary;
- Liaise with the student, supervisor, university, and any other stakeholders as identified; necessary;
- Maintain confidentiality at all times where personal information is disclosed;
- Respond sympathetically to all notifications of sickness absence and ensure proper consideration of the student circumstances;

### **4. Notification of Absence**

If a student is unwell whilst on placement they are required to contact both their placement supervisor and the Faith Nurture Forum Education and Training team prior to 10am on the first morning of their illness/non-attendance. This contact should be made by phone; text or email is not acceptable, and the student themselves should make this contact. Exceptions will only be permitted in circumstances where the student is unable to make the call. The student should let their supervisor know the reason for the absence, and the expected duration if known, and if any alternative arrangements need to be made whilst they are on placement.

The student is expected to keep in regular contact with their supervisor throughout the duration of their absence, and on an agreed basis. The supervisor will keep Faith Nurture Forum Education and Training team informed after each contact.

### **5. Significant Absence**

For the purposes of this policy, a significant absence is an absence of more than a) one week for probationers or candidates on summer placements or b) two weeks if a candidate is on part-time placement. Absence will also be considered significant if it prevents a student from attending for exam or assessment.

Significant Absence must be certified using any of the following:

- Medical documentation (medical certificate, medical report, hospital appointment) or;

- A note from an independent responsible person who can vouch for the event which led to the absence or;
- A letter from a student counsellor or other professional that the student actually consulted during the period when the difficulties were occurring.

These sources are not exhaustive and other suitable sources will be considered.

If exams are missed, the Faith Nurture Forum will work with the student and the university to resolve matters as far as possible.

## **6. Return from Absence**

Students must complete a student absence return form (Appendix 1) for all absences due to sickness, illness or accident. It is the responsibility of each student to give a clear explanation of the illness, duration and to confirm that they are fit and well to resume placement. This should be completed within 24 hours of their return and arrange to meet with their supervisor. The supervisor will then complete their part of the form and using the form, record the conversation to make any necessary arrangements or adjustments, confirming that the student is well to resume placement and actioning any further support. This discussion can be held by phone or by email. The supervisor should then send the form to Faith Nurture Forum who will receipt the form.

## **7. Suspension from Placement due to Sickness Absence**

If the period of sickness absence exceeds 12 weeks, Faith Nurture Forum will discuss with students a suspension of their placement. Suspensions of placements are not granted retrospectively and Faith Nurture Forum is able to enforce a suspension of placement if required, or in circumstances where the student is unable to do so.

## **8. Funding and Stipends**

Funding for candidate placement and stipendiary support for Probationers is not generally affected by non-attendance through sickness absence.

For Candidates: If suspension of studies is agreed as a course of action to allow for a period of recovery, and defined as above, the grant will not be recalled but you may be expected to complete additional placement time.

For Probationers: If a Probationer is absent through sickness for a period of greater than 3 consecutive months, stipend will be temporarily suspended and will only recommence when the student is able to return to placement. At this point a discussion will be held with the student and a decision will be made with the student that either, and dependent on the nature of the illness and the expected duration of the absence, probation time will be extended, or if the student is unable to continue, the placement will be terminated and may be rearranged.

## **9. Monitoring and Review**

The impact of this policy will be monitored and the policy is subject to amendments as necessary.  
The policy will be reviewed every two years as a minimum.

<b>Date First Published:</b>	<b>September 2018</b>
<b>Date of Last Review:</b>	<b>December 2020</b>
<b>Frequency of Review:</b>	<b>2 years</b>
<b>Approved by:</b>	<b>E&amp;S Committee</b>

**Appendix 1: Faith Nurture Forum – IME Student Absence Return Form**

<b>Student Name</b>		<b>Date of Absence (from/to)</b>	
<b>Placement Location and Supervisor Name</b>		<b>Date returned to placement</b>	
<b>Total number of days absent</b>		<b>Significant Absence</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
<b>Reason for Absence (please state if applicable if this absence is related to a Disability)</b>			
<b>Was the supervisor notified properly</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Was Faith Nurture Forum notified properly</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
<b>Certification for the Absence (please tick and if supplied to you, please include)</b>			
<b>Medical Certificate*</b>		<b>Other certification</b>	
<b>Uncertified (if significant)</b>		<b>Certification not required (if absence is less than 7 days)</b>	
<b>If a medical practitioner was consulted, are there any considerations for your return to placement e.g. phased return</b>		<b>Yes – please detail No – no action required</b>	
<b>For Completion by Supervisor</b>			
<b>Please detail any discussion that took place. Please also confirm that the student is able to return to placement and any other arrangements agreed.</b>			
<b>For Faith Nurture Forum Use</b>			
<b>Detail any action to be taken (including follow up, occupational health referral, suspension of placement, any reasonable adjustments (in the case of a disability))</b>			

Student signature	
Supervisor signature	
On behalf of Faith Nurture Forum	

**A copy of this form will be retained by Faith Nurture Forum and a copy should be provided to the student.**

## **Appendix 2: Absence: Students with a Disability: Additional Guidance**

The Equality Act 2010 defines a person as disabled if “they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term (has lasted or is expected to last for at least 12 months) adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

Faith Nurture Forum staff with responsibility for IME students will look at the underlying reasons for any absences to determine if they are because of a disability or a reason related to a disability. Staff should assess the circumstances on an individual basis as each disability and illness is distinct to each individual. When dealing with disabilities it is essential to consider the disabling effects on the student and not just the disorder itself. Staff must consider making reasonable adjustments for a student with a disability.

Faith Nurture Forum will make reasonable adjustments wherever possible to remove barriers for a person living with a disability so that he/she :

- can effectively carrying out his or her role
- can acquire a role that he or she is otherwise capable of doing
- is not otherwise being placed at a substantial disadvantage.

On learning that a student has a disability, Faith Nurture Forum are required to consider making reasonable adjustments to any of their provisions, criteria or practices that place that disabled person at a particular disadvantage compared to non-disabled persons. A failure to comply with this duty to make reasonable adjustments amounts to discrimination.

### **Examples of Reasonable Adjustments**

The list of reasonable adjustments that could be made to accommodate the needs of a disabled student is infinite. However, the following list (which is not exhaustive) sets out some possibilities. Adjustments can be agreed on a temporary or a permanent basis. Some can be arranged locally while others may need the support of other departments such as Estates or IT. Often adjustments can be made at low or no cost yet make a significant difference to the ability of a person living with a disability enabling them to perform well in a role. They should always be made in consultation with the student.

- Making adjustments to physical features to the environment by, for example, relocating door handles or shelves for someone who has difficulty reaching.
- Giving, or arranging for, training or mentoring for the disabled person.
- Moving an individual with limited mobility to a ground-floor location.
- Acquiring or modifying equipment, for example providing voice-activated software for someone with a visual impairment, or an ergonomic keyboard for someone with musculo-skeletal difficulties.
- Agreeing to part-time engagement in training on either a temporary or a permanent basis.
- Adjusting procedural requirements, for example allowing a student with a recurring illness to take more time off training on sick absence than would normally be acceptable under the disciplinary policy

- Altering the person living with a disability's training pattern, for example allowing someone with a fluctuating condition such as multiple sclerosis to engage in training more flexibly to allow them to work at the time of day when his or her energy levels are at their greatest.
- Altering the start and/or end times of the day could, for example, enable someone with a stress-related illness to avoid the busy rush hour period.

Where appropriate, staff should seek advice from the Occupational Health Service provider and record all reasonable adjustments agreed and made.