

# Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedures

## Purpose

To recognise situations in which students are unable to successfully complete assessment due to circumstances beyond their control, and to support them in completing assessment, as appropriate to their situation.

## Principles

Our policy and practice should:

- Be fair;
- Be applied consistently;
- Recognise and respond to real student need;
- Encourage students to engage early in their modules, and to complete them;
- Not disadvantage students;
- Be simple, understandable and administratively straightforward.

## Practice

A number of options are available to students to allow them to continue with their studies despite mitigating circumstances. These are described in detail below, and the appropriate option will depend on the student's particular circumstances.

### *1 Short extensions to coursework: illness and other short-term issues*

Many of the circumstances faced by students relate to short-term issues that could be resolved by a short extension to the due date. The University recognises that short-term illness and other issues can occur unexpectedly, and that it may be difficult to provide supporting evidence for such events.

To take account of this, students are able to exercise an entitlement to a **48 hour extension for a maximum of two assessments** in each academic year.

This can only be used for coursework (assignment, report, portfolio etc.) that has a designated hand-in date, and the extension can be obtained by accessing the 'request 48 hour extension' link in OASIS. This may be used **no later than midnight on the day the coursework is due to be submitted**.

Approval will be automatic on the first and second assessments where a 48 hour extension is requested in an academic year. This facility cannot be used for a third or subsequent assessment; a mitigating circumstances application, with supporting evidence, would be required for any further extension request.

### *2 Longer extensions to coursework*

Where a student has circumstances that require an extension of longer than 48 hours, or where they have already had two 48 hour extensions in an academic year, they should complete a Coursework Extension Application form. This must be submitted **no later than the day on which the coursework is due to be submitted**.

Supporting evidence is required for an extension application. If an application is submitted without evidence (e.g. where the student is waiting for a GP's letter), the evidence must be submitted no

more than 5 working days after the coursework due date. Details of acceptable grounds, and appropriate evidence, for extension are given below. Where an extension is granted, it will normally be for 5 working days. Exceptionally, an extension of 10 working days may be granted, with the approval of the Academic Curriculum Manager of the student's school.

### **3      *Deferral of examinations or coursework***

Where a student is unable to undertake a piece of coursework or an examination due to mitigating circumstances, they may apply to defer to the next assessment opportunity. For deferral of assessment to be considered, students must complete the Assessment Deferral Application form. Supporting evidence is required for a deferral application. Details of acceptable grounds, and appropriate evidence, for deferral are given below. Where possible, the student should apply for deferral in advance of the coursework deadline or examination date, otherwise, as soon as is practicably possible thereafter. **Deferral applications must be submitted, including evidence, within 5 working days of the assessment date** (assessment hand-in date or examination date). Only in extreme cases, such as emergency hospitalisation, will forms be accepted later. In no circumstances will deferral be considered after the Assessment Board has met.

Where deferral of an assessment is granted, the student will be expected to take it at the second assessment opportunity, and the grade they achieve will not be capped. However, it is important to note that each assessment has only two opportunities in an academic year, and so at the second opportunity, if the student is unable to complete the assessment, decides not to complete the assessment, or fails, there is no further assessment available. In such cases, where the student is eligible to continue in their studies, they will be required to repeat the module (or an approved alternative) in full.

### ***Missed assessments or examinations***

Where a student misses an examination or other assessment, and deferral is not approved, a grade of NS will be recorded. However, they will normally be permitted to take it at the second assessment opportunity as a reassessment, with the module grade capped at D. In such cases the student should confirm to the Programme and Assessment team in writing that they wish to undertake reassessment.

### ***Fitness to sit assessments***

By handing in a piece of coursework or completing an examination, a student is normally declaring fitness to undertake a valid attempt at the assessment. Exceptionally, however, where a student has completed an assessment, but believes their performance has been affected by serious mitigating circumstances, the student should notify the Programme and Assessment team in writing, with supporting evidence, within 10 working days of the assessment date. The evidence may take the form of a statement from an adviser or counsellor in Student Services, or from the Students' Association Advice and Welfare Co-ordinator.

### ***Suspension***

In cases where a student experiences longer-term or more serious problems, a suspension of studies may be more appropriate than deferral of assessment. For example, where a student is ill for several weeks, or where their circumstances will not have improved by the second assessment opportunity, suspension of study until the following year may be recommended. Students wishing to consider suspension should arrange to meet their School's Academic Curriculum Manager in the

first instance, but should note that suspension cannot be granted for a term after week 10 of that term.

### **Definitions and acceptable evidence**

Mitigating circumstances are defined as factors beyond the student's control which disrupt their studies or affect their performance in assessment. For the first two requests each academic year for a 48 hour extension, no evidence is required. For any other extension or deferral, the student must have acceptable grounds for deferral, supported by evidence. The evidence should cover the period during which the assessment is due, and should be from a person who can verify the circumstances at that time.

### ***Acceptable grounds for deferral or extension***

The following grounds are acceptable, supported by the evidence listed:

1. Death of a close person.

"Close" can mean parents, guardians, children and siblings, a spouse/partner and it may include friends, in-laws, grandparents and grandchildren if it can be shown that the relationship was very close. A death certificate or order of service will be accepted.

2. Illness or serious accident of the student.

A medical certificate should be submitted that covers illness or accident occurring at the time of an assessment. It may also relate to an assault where the student is the victim, or to a break or serious sprain of the normal writing hand/arm. Evidence from a University Counsellor or Mental Health Adviser may also be submitted.

3. Serious illness of a close relative.

A medical certificate should be submitted that covers the serious illness of a close relative, including accidents or serious deterioration of an existing illness.

4. Independent verification of serious personal disruption.

This may include fire, burglary, requirement to appear in Court etc. relevant to the date of the assessment or the period immediately before it. Supporting third-party evidence must be provided. Travel problems are not normally accepted as students are expected to plan ahead.

5. Employment-related issues.

For part-time students only, evidence of significant impact of employment circumstances. A letter from the employer on headed paper should be submitted. This will normally only be accepted for an extension to a submission date, not the deferral of the assignment or an examination event. NB: This is not acceptable grounds for full-time students.

6. Disability

Where it has not been possible to take a disability into account prior to the assessment, or where the student has experienced a significant worsening of symptoms, a letter from a Disability Advisor will be considered.

7. Severe weather

Where students are unable to attend an examination due to severe weather, evidence such as screen prints of web pages from travel providers, Traffic Scotland or the Met Office should be provided. These will be expected to show that travel was not possible on the day in question.

## 8. Elite athletes

Students participating in the University's Elite Athletes programme may be eligible for extension or deferral, based on the terms of their learning contract.

### *Unacceptable grounds for extension or deferral*

#### 1. Social activities

Busy social life, parties, visits by/to friends, sporting fixtures.

#### 2. Temporary self-induced conditions

Hangovers, recreational drug taking, or taking of medication where it is known that there may be an adverse reaction that could reasonably have been avoided, e.g. drowsiness.

#### 3. Examination stress or general stress relating to meeting coursework deadlines.

Examination stress or stress in practice placement will not, by itself, be considered as a mitigating circumstance. It is expected that individuals in higher education will develop the ability to deal with this and produce satisfactory work whilst meeting deadlines.

#### 4. Domestic or personal disruptions which could have been anticipated or planned

Moving house, holidays, weddings or other events where the student either has control over the date or may choose not to participate. Change of job or "normal" job pressure, failed travel arrangements, illness of pets, oversleeping, misreading examinations timetable or other assessment details, taking the wrong examination or assessment.

#### 5. Study-related

Computer difficulties, losing work not backed up appropriately, deadline congestion, examination congestion, missing books, examination rescheduling, delays in printing, photocopying or binding of assessed work.

#### 6. Examination conditions

Disruption in the examination room: poor lighting, ventilation or heating, excessive noise, illness or behaviour of other students. Normally such conditions will have been reported by the invigilators, so that they can be taken into account by the Assessment Board.

### **Decisions regarding extension or deferral**

The Registry Programme and Assessment team and Academic Curriculum Managers have full discretion as to the validity of any application made and the decision reached. Decisions made will be officially communicated to, and be binding on, the relevant Assessment Board.

Academic Registry

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