

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES PANEL - GROUND RULES 2021-22

Introduction

The University has established a number of ground rules to acknowledge that no two cases of student extenuating circumstances are identical and that there will always be extenuating circumstances which cannot be assigned to specific categories.

The following ground rules contain some illustrative precedents and are set out in accordance with University Regulations under the examples of extenuating circumstances that may be treated as adversely affecting a student's performance in assessment. They are intended to provide guidance to ensure that consistency is maintained with the Panel's decisions across the university.

A student cannot raise an extenuating circumstance on behalf of another.

1 Illness affecting attendance at examinations or preparation for or of an assessment

- 1.1 Where the circumstances relate to illness, a doctor's certificate or equivalent covering the relevant period(s) is required. Other evidence can be considered but, in general, a letter from a parent, other relative or guardian should **not** be accepted as supporting evidence.
- 1.2 In cases relating to illness, students will be required to provide supporting evidence from members of relevant registered professional bodies.
- 1.3 If a student is unable to access medical services to request evidence due to limitations of their home broadband and/or due to reduced medical services being offered in their local area the panel should consider other forms of evidence such as a tutor statement. This is relevant to students studying partially or wholly outside of the University due to the changes in teaching delivery in response to Covid 19.

2 Being the victim of a crime

If a student's extenuating circumstances involve being the victim of a crime, the documentation should include relevant supporting evidence from the police or medical evidence. Evidence should include but not be limited to a crime reference number.

3 Circumstances of a serious personal or emotional nature

- 3.1 Supporting evidence is required for all claims of extenuating circumstances including cases involving situations of a serious personal or emotional nature such as divorce, court attendance or childcare problems. All claims for extenuating circumstances are treated confidentially.
- 3.2 Where the circumstances are not related to illness, some form of validation is still required. It is difficult to be prescriptive but typically it could be from an academic tutor and/or the University Counselling service.
- 3.3 For the purpose of extenuating circumstances, the definition of close family member refers to a parent, child, spouse or sibling. Where circumstances, such as bereavement, relate to a relative outside the definition of a close family member, additional supporting evidence will be required to support the claim.

- 3.4 Financial difficulties will not be accepted as mitigation *per se*. If, however, a student produces independent evidence of stress, loss of time etc. caused by difficulties, this may be considered to be an extenuating circumstance adversely affecting performance.

4 Other preventable events

- 4.1 The Panel will use an established range of precedents relating to 'pressures of work'. The norm is not to accept statements equivalent to students having a heavy workload from their employment (including part time postgraduate students). There are two types of exception to this norm – one clear cut, the other where the student is given the benefit of the doubt (subject to documentary evidence) –
- 'force majeure' ('Acts of God') - such as an employer refusing to give a part time student time off work to attend an examination;
 - extreme cases of heavy work duties in the period immediately prior to an examination.
- 4.2 Transport failures/difficulties may be accepted as valid reasons for missing examinations provided there is independent documentary evidence of the time of the breakdown/failure.
- 4.3 Although technology failure is not a valid extenuating circumstance (see 10.3) the University recognises that issues with broadband and other access issues could be considered to be so. This is relevant to students studying partially or wholly outside of the University due to the changes in teaching delivery in response to Covid 19. The panel should take into account that some students have poor broadband or are limited to the period of time they are able to access it. Students should provide evidence of the specific issue with their broadband access that affected the assessment that they are claiming for.

5 Circumstances involving University systems and facilities

Extenuating circumstances arising from University systems' failures or a major disruption involving University facilities and services (for example, inadequate accommodation leading to exam disruption), should normally be managed at School, College or University level.

6 Allegation of academic offences and simultaneous claim for extenuating circumstances

Where extenuating circumstances and an academic offence allegation are to be considered for the same student, the circumstances will be considered in accordance with University Regulation A.1.4 and Undergraduate Regulation 5.8.

7 Sporting Excellence

Where a student participates in national or international sporting fixtures, and there is no possibility of rescheduling the event this may be treated by the panel as a valid extenuating circumstance.

8 Military Service

Where a student, who is a member of the military, is posted to an out of area operation overseas, then this would be treated by the panel as a valid extenuating circumstance. Students so affected would be expected to interrupt their studies and fees payable would be adjusted accordingly.

9 Religious Observance

Where a student's performance in an examination is impacted by difficulties related to fasting (Ramadan), this may be treated as a valid extenuating circumstance on receipt of independent evidence from a religious leader that provides confirmation of impact.

10 Other examples of extenuating circumstances not deemed to be valid

- 10.1 The Panel will not accept as valid extenuating circumstances from a student taking up paid employment which clashed with an examination. Please see section 5 above.
- 10.2 Misinformation from a friend or colleague is not a valid excuse for missing an examination or assessment hand-in date – it is the student's responsibility to present themselves at the correct examination venue at the correct time or to submit any assessments due at the correct time and in the correct format.
- 10.3 Technology failure is not a valid reason for the non-submission of work and will not be treated by the Panel as a valid extenuating circumstance. Please see section 5 above.
- 10.4 The increased use of group assessment tasks can lead to claims. The Panel will consider that when tasks are set, it is inherent that effective group activities are an integral part of the assessment process. Such claims are therefore not accepted.
- 10.5 Booking or taking a holiday or attending a family event (such as a wedding) will not be normally accepted as a valid extenuating circumstance as the dates of assessment weeks are publicised well in advance to allow students to take account of their study commitments and examination obligations.
- 10.6 Where a student who has been provided with a Learning Support Plan for a disclosed disability chooses not to use the recommended support, any claim of Extenuating Circumstances based on the lack of support will not be upheld.

11 Supporting evidence

In personally sensitive circumstances, where it is not possible for a student to provide documentary evidence to support a claim of extenuating circumstances, a supportive Personal Tutor statement can be submitted with the claim for the Panel's consideration.