

## **EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES POLICY**

### **Purpose**

1. This document defines the University of Suffolk's policy for dealing with extenuating circumstances related to student assessment including claims for: extensions to assessment deadlines, deferral of assessment, further opportunity to take examinations, and intercalation from studies.

### **Scope**

2. This Policy applies to all students registered on University of Suffolk courses with the exception of those whose final assessment is totally controlled by examining/professional bodies external to the Institution. In this case, the regulations of such examining/professional bodies with regard to assessment will override those of the Institution.

### **Principles**

3. The University of Suffolk is an institution which aims to support students to succeed in their studies and will be mindful of that context in the implementation of this Policy.

4. Where a student submits a claim for extenuating circumstances, this is given full consideration by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (see Appendix 1 for the Terms of Reference) and, where the claim is accepted, the student shall be offered an outcome by the relevant Assessment Board which incurs no academic penalty.

5. No student shall be placed in a position of unfair advantage over other students; the aim being to enable all students to be assessed on equal terms.

6. The Assessment Board shall not change, amend or estimate marks where extenuating circumstances have been accepted.

7. By submitting work for assessment, sitting an examination or otherwise engaging with summative assessment (e.g. by presentation) a student is acknowledging that he or she is fit to do so and the work will be marked on its merits without consideration of any extenuating circumstances known to the marker, and any claim for extenuating circumstances will be nullified.

8. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel shall undertake its business in a fair, reasonable, sensible, student-focused and timely manner.

9. Personal and sensitive data will be treated confidentially and its consideration restricted to those who need to know in order for a decision to be made. It is recognised that there may be particular instances where the evidence is of such a nature that only the Chair of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel should have sight of it.

10. All students (see 2 above) shall be informed of this Policy at the start of their studies and guidance will be available on MySuffolk to ensure that the Policy is transparent and accessible.

### **Extenuating circumstances and assessment**

11. During a period of study a student may encounter significant personal difficulties that impact on his or her ability to study for or complete summative assessment including examinations. The University refers to these personal difficulties as 'extenuating circumstances'.

12. Students have a responsibility for managing their learning, revision and assessment activities throughout the academic year. It is expected that students will plan such activities carefully and that the preparation of too much assessed work or revision for examination is not left until the last moment.

13. The University recognises that illness and difficult or distressing personal circumstances occur as part of everyone's life and may affect students. Such circumstances are a normal part of life, however, and can usually be absorbed. If a set of circumstances are such as will prevent a student engaging effectively with his or her programme of study, suspending study and taking a period of time out (intercalation) should be considered. If a student remains on a course, the University will start any consideration of a request for extenuating circumstances from the point of view that a student has taken the decision that he or she is fit to engage with the programme.

14. Claims for extenuating circumstances should only be made in exceptional situations. In order for extenuating circumstances to be considered in the case of a student's failure to submit work for assessment in a timely manner or sit an examination, the Extenuating Circumstances Panel will need to be assured that:

- a student could not have reasonably avoided the situation or acted to limit the impact; this includes making a decision to suspend academic study if a student considers that he or she cannot cope with the demands of the programme at the time;
- the circumstances concerned were genuinely exceptional;
- the circumstances impacted adversely on the assessment activity in question; and
- the timing of the circumstances was relevant to the assessment activity in question.

## **Intercalation**

15. Intercalation is defined as an authorised break in studies during a course, but after the course has commenced. Granting intercalation status assumes that the student has been judged to have the potential to continue with their studies after a break, but does not guarantee that there is an automatic right to return or that the course will be available in its present form or at all on return.

16. Students on courses subject to the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) or Tier 4 students should be mindful of the implications of intercalation and seek early advice from relevant tutors or support services.

17. It is the responsibility of the student to resolve any financial implications of intercalation. The Tuition Fee Policy details the timeframe for payment of fees.

18. Students with approved intercalation status will have access to the University of Suffolk library, Learning Services, Student Services, MySuffolk and Brightspace.

## **What can be claimed?**

### **19. *Extension to assessment submission deadline***

- Students may submit claims for extensions to assessment submission deadlines on the basis of extenuating circumstances. The length of the approved extension will be constrained by the need for work to be submitted in time for it to be marked and moderated before the Assessment Board meets. If there is insufficient time for these processes, then a claim for deferral of submission of assessment on the grounds of extenuating circumstances may be appropriate.
- Normally the maximum length of extension to the published submission deadline is ten working days.
- Normally claims for extensions must be submitted to the Extenuating Circumstances Officer at least five working days in advance of the assessment deadline.

### **20. *Deferral of submission of assessment or examination***

- Students may submit claims for deferral of submission of assessment or examination on the basis of extenuating circumstances. Claims for deferral should be made if an extension to the assessment submission deadline is not appropriate or sufficient (see paragraph 19 above).
- Normally claims for deferral of submission of assessment or examination must be

submitted to the Extenuating Circumstances Officer at least five working days in advance of the assessment deadline or examination date.

21. ***Intercalation of studies***

- Students may submit claims to intercalate their studies on the basis of extenuating circumstances where they are not fit or able to study for an extended period.
- Normally the maximum period of intercalation is one academic year.
- An extension of a year's intercalation will only be granted in exceptional evidenced circumstances, and for no more than a further academic year.
- In some cases, a student may be advised to withdraw from the course and take any award for which sufficient credit has been achieved that is permissible within the relevant assessment regulations.
- Claims to intercalate studies may be made at any time as soon as possible after the circumstances that have prompted the request have occurred.
- Where accepted, the date of intercalation will be taken as the date the claim was submitted, and the student shall incur no academic penalty for any work due to be submitted on or after the date of intercalation.
- The Framework and Regulations for the relevant award set out the implications for the status of assessment already undertaken.

**Grounds for extenuating circumstances**

22. Circumstances that may be considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel as exceptional or 'unforeseen' and over and above the course of everyday experience include:

- significant short-term illness, accident or injury (of a nature which, in an employment context, would have led to an absence on sick leave);
- the death or serious illness of a close family member or dependent (of a nature which, in an employment context, would have led to an absence in accordance with compassionate leave regulations);
- significant adverse personal or family circumstances directly affecting the student;
- evidence of deterioration of a long-term health condition;
- other significant exceptional factors for which there is evidence of stress caused.

23. Circumstances that will not normally be considered as extenuating include:

- alleged statement of a medical condition without reasonable evidence (medical or otherwise) to support it;
- alleged extenuating circumstances that fall outside the relevant assessment period, that is,

that could not have reasonably affected the assessment in question;

- alleged medical condition supported by 'retrospective' medical evidence – that is, evidence that is not in existence at the same time as the illness, for example a doctor's note which states that the student was seen (after the illness occurred) and declared they had been ill previously;
- if there is a reasonable case that circumstances relied on were foreseeable or preventable;
- long-term health condition or specific learning need for which the student is already receiving reasonable or appropriate adjustments (but see 24 below);
- minor illnesses (such as coughs and colds) which in a work situation would be unlikely to lead to absence from work;
- personal computer or printer problems;
- poor practice, for example no back-up of electronic documents;
- inadequate planning and time management preventing completion or submission of assessment;
- missed buses or traffic delays causing late arrival;
- claims that students were unaware of the dates or times of submission or examination;
- stress or panic attacks, that occur in examinations, but are not diagnosed as an illness or documented in a Reasonable Adjustments Agreement under the aegis of Student Services;
- assessments or examinations scheduled close together;
- personal or domestic events, such as moving house or attending a wedding;
- holiday or travel arrangements;
- financial issues;
- routine consequences of paid employment;
- sports activities;
- late disclosure of circumstances on the basis that the student 'felt unable/did not feel comfortable' confiding in a member of staff about their extenuating circumstances.

24. Prolonged, chronic or long-term conditions are not normally considered a basis for extenuating circumstances. Students with a chronic illness or disability are encouraged to access the support services available which can put in place reasonable adjustments for specific learning requirements and examinations (see Code of Practice on Reasonable Adjustments for Students). However, the timing of the diagnosis of such conditions may be considered a basis for extenuating circumstances where anticipatory reasonable adjustments could not have adequately met the student's support needs for the assessment in question.

## Evidence

25. All claims for consideration of extenuating circumstances must normally be accompanied by independent third party evidence which should confirm the existence of the extenuating circumstances and state how the reported circumstances have impacted on the student concerned. There may be occasions when the University wishes to use its discretion in relation to the type of evidence it will accept. Where evidence can be provided it should be provided but there may be exceptional cases where, for a variety of confidential reasons (for example sensitive personal data), this is not possible.

26. A non-exhaustive list of examples of acceptable third party evidence includes:

- medical/health certificate (with relevant date to the assessment)
- death certificate (copy)
- police report (of relevant incident)
- letter of support/explanation from a support service at the University of Suffolk, e.g. disability or counselling
- letter of support/explanation from a third party (e.g. solicitor, employer)

27. A non-exhaustive list of examples of evidence that would not normally be accepted includes:

- a letter from a partner or close relative/friend particularly where a medical certificate would be expected to be provided;
- anecdotal evidence from staff or students;
- the word of a tutor alone (except where the student is physically unable to make a claim because they are in hospital or a similar situation and the tutor is privy to the circumstances and is authorised by the Academic Registrar to make a claim on the student's behalf);
- a self-certificated medical note.

28. Where evidence relates to another person and contains any personal or sensitive data as identified under the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) or the Data Protection Act (2018) (for example personal information relating to a family member, or medical records for a person who is not the student) it is the responsibility of the student to gain permission from that person to submit this information to the Extenuating Circumstances Panel. The Extenuating Circumstances Officer and/or Panel will not make enquiries to obtain consent to share information on a student's behalf.

29. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel (or the Extenuating Circumstances Officer in the case of extensions to submission deadlines – see paragraph 40) will use their discretion to decide whether the evidence submitted is acceptable. The student is responsible for providing

acceptable and sufficient evidence. The Extenuating Circumstances Officer and/or Panel will not make enquiries to obtain evidence on a student's behalf.

### **Making a claim**

30. Any student wishing to make a claim for consideration of extenuating circumstances affecting their study must complete the online Extenuating Circumstances claim form available on MySuffolk as soon as possible and no later than the deadlines detailed in paragraph 31 below. All sections of the form must be completed. Supporting evidence must be sent either electronically or in paper form to the Extenuating Circumstances Officer. Fuller guidance is available on MySuffolk.

31. Normally all claims must be submitted to the Extenuating Circumstances Officer at least five working days in advance of the final assessment deadline/examination date. Requests for extensions to submission deadlines or deferral of work received after this will only be considered in the most exceptional circumstances, for example admission to hospital preventing a student being able to submit work either online or in person, or illness or accident just before or on the day of an examination. Claims to intercalate studies should be made as soon as possible after the circumstances that prompted the request have occurred. The relevant course/module leader will be advised simultaneously that a claim for extenuating circumstances has been received and will have the opportunity to provide a comment to the Extenuating Circumstances Panel if appropriate.

32. Students will normally be advised of the outcome of extenuating circumstances claims requesting extensions to submission deadlines within three working days of receipt of the online claim form and supporting evidence. The outcome of all other claims for extenuating circumstances affecting assessment will normally be advised to students within five working days of the relevant meeting of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel. Relevant course/module leaders will also be advised of the outcome of claims in order that appropriate preparation for Assessment Boards can take place. Tutors should discuss any concerns about the outcome of claims with the Chair of the Assessment Board, ideally before the Board meets.

33. Students will need to supply evidence as soon as possible and at the latest within ten working days of the submission of the online claim form or by the date of the relevant Extenuating Circumstances Panel (as published on MySuffolk) whichever is the earlier. Students should be aware, if evidence is delayed, that their claim may not be considered and the Assessment Board will make its decision accordingly.

34. Where the Extenuating Circumstances Panel does not accept that the claim for extenuating circumstances meets the criteria set out in the *Grounds for extenuating circumstances* (paragraphs

22 to 24) above, the relevant assessment regulations will be invoked by the Assessment Board.

### **Role of tutors**

35. Students may, in the first instance, raise possible extenuating circumstances with their Personal Tutor or a member of the Course Team. Tutors do not play an official role in the decision-making process but are available to provide support to students as appropriate. Tutors should make clear that it is the student's responsibility to complete the online Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form and supply supporting evidence. Tutors must not authorise requests for extensions to submission deadlines or claims for extenuating circumstances. Tutors may however choose to comment on claims once they are received, particularly in those instances where the student has shared information with them about their personal circumstances, in order to supplement the information to be considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (or the Extenuating Circumstances Officer in the case of extensions to submission deadlines). In the case of requests to intercalate studies, it is expected that students will have discussed their situation with their Course Leader before submitting a claim.

36. Tutors should ensure that students have a realistic understanding of the range of actions and remedies that are available to deal with their circumstances and be aware that some students may be reluctant to report extenuating circumstances and may consider this a sign of weakness or failure. While tutors may refer students to Student Services where appropriate, staff at these services will not be able to provide supporting evidence of extenuating circumstances if students have had no prior engagement with them. Tutors should not refer students to these services solely to collect further supporting evidence of extenuating circumstances.

### **Extenuating Circumstances Panel**

37. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel is convened at regular intervals to consider all claims for extenuating circumstances. This ensures consistency of approach across the range of courses offered within the University of Suffolk and the Partner colleges. The dates of Panels are published annually on MySuffolk. The Panel has devolved authority from Assessment Boards to determine whether claims for extenuating circumstances meet the approved criteria and for overseeing the approval of extensions to submission deadlines where work will be complete in time for marking, moderation and consideration by Assessment Boards. The Assessment Board is responsible for deciding the outcome of all other successful claims for extenuating circumstances including deferral of assessment, further opportunity to sit examinations, and intercalation from studies.

38. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel membership includes academic staff with



experience of the range of assessment experienced at the University.

39. The consideration of extenuating circumstances need not involve a physical meeting of members of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel if alternative methods of discussion and mutual deliberation are available.

40. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel will delegate responsibility for the approval of extensions to submission deadlines against the agreed criteria set out in paragraph 22 to 24 to the Extenuating Circumstances Officer, who will supervise the administration of the process by relevant Course Administrators. Claims for extensions to submission deadlines that are not straightforward will be considered by the full Extenuating Circumstances Panel.

### **Fitness to Practise**

41. On courses leading to professional registration to practise, student claims for extenuating circumstances may raise fitness to practise concerns. Where this is the case, the matter will be reported to the relevant Dean of School by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel for consideration under the Fitness to Practise Procedure.

### **Fitness to Study**

42. Where student claims for extenuating circumstances raise potential fitness to study concerns, the matter will be reported to the relevant Dean of School by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel for consideration under the Fitness to Study Procedure.

### **Safeguarding**

43. Where student claims for extenuating circumstances raise potential safeguarding issues, either for the student or others, the matter will be referred by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel to the Designated Safeguarding Officer for consideration in accordance with the University's Safeguarding Policy and Code of Practice.

### **Outcomes**

44. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel will inform the relevant Assessment Boards whether or not claims for extenuating circumstances have been successful, identify cases where extensions have been agreed, and where appropriate recommend possible courses of action. The relevant Assessment Board will then decide, in the context of the student's overall profile and the relevant assessment regulations and any PSRB requirements, an appropriate course of action which may include:

- Allowing the student to be assessed as if for the first time in any or all of the components

of assessment. If an assessment affected by extenuating circumstances was itself a second attempt, the student may be permitted to be reassessed as if for the second time;

- Permitting the student to progress within the constraints of the relevant assessment regulations for the award;
- Where progression requirements have not been met, permitting the student to retake the year or part of the year, with or without a break in their studies (intercalation);
- Recommending that the student take an authorised break in their studies (intercalation), detailing how assessment already undertaken will be treated;
- Recommending that the student be transferred to an alternative course;
- Recommending the student for an Aegrotat award where there is insufficient evidence to determine the classification of an award, if satisfied that the student would have qualified for the award for which they were registered had it not been for illness or other valid cause.

45. In cases where the student has submitted a claim in a timely fashion but the supporting evidence is outstanding by the time the Assessment Board meets, the student's mark will be recorded as referred (no work submitted). If, following the Board, the student submits evidence within ten working days of submission of the claim form which satisfies the Extenuating Circumstances Panel, the Chair of the Assessment Board will be notified accordingly. The Chair may decide to convene a Chair's Action Board to determine whether to consider the extenuating circumstances or hold this decision until the next meeting of the full Board.

46. In extremely exceptional circumstances, an Assessment Board may, on the recommendation of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel, consider retrospective extenuating circumstances, that is a claim from a student following the outcome of an Assessment Board that their study had been affected adversely by circumstances of which they were unaware at the time and which they could not have reasonably reported by the extenuating circumstances deadline (for example an undiagnosed mental health condition).

## **Appeals**

47. A student who is dissatisfied with the decision of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel may appeal under the terms of the Academic Appeals Procedure available on MySuffolk.

## APPENDIX 1

### EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES PANEL

#### Terms of Reference

1. To have delegated authority from University Assessment Boards to determine whether student claims for extenuating circumstances meet the criteria set out in the Extenuating Circumstances Policy, noting that Assessment Boards retain the responsibility for deciding the outcome of successful claims for extenuating circumstances including deferral of assessment, further opportunity to sit examinations and intercalation from studies.
2. To have delegated authority from Assessment Boards to oversee the process of approval of extensions to submission deadlines where work will be complete in time for marking, moderation and consideration by Assessment Boards (as set out in the Extenuating Circumstances Policy).
3. To ensure that the decisions of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel are notified to students, their tutors and Assessment Boards to the timescales set out in the Extenuating Circumstances Policy.
4. To note that consideration of extenuating circumstances need not involve a physical meeting of members of the Panel if alternative methods of discussion and mutual deliberation are available.
5. To review regularly the membership and operation of the Panel to ensure its fitness for purpose.
6. To ensure that Panel members receive appropriate guidance on the operation of the Extenuating Circumstances Policy.
7. To note that the Policy is subject to regular review in accordance with the schedule approved by the Quality Committee on behalf of Senate.

#### Membership

- Deputy Academic Registrar (Registry Services) (Chair)
- Assistant Registrar (Registry Services)
- Head of Student Services
- Academic staff representing the range of assessment experienced at the University of Suffolk (3)

Total membership: [6]

#### Secretary

- Extenuating Circumstances Officer