

DEGREE STUDIES AT WEST SUFFOLK COLLEGE

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES POLICY

Purpose During their study students may encounter significant personal difficulties that are outside their control and impact on their ability to study and/or complete assessments. This Policy provides mechanisms by which students may bring circumstances having a detrimental impact on their study to the attention of Degree Studies at West Suffolk College. The policy allows for the consideration of the impact of those circumstances on students' academic performance and the provision of measures to address the impact, where possible and appropriate.

Scope This Policy applies to all students registered on Degree Studies at West Suffolk College and Access to HE courses with the exception of those who follow the policies of their awarding body. In this case, the regulations of such awarding/professional bodies with regard to assessment will override those of the Degree Studies at West Suffolk College.

Principles:

1. In order to be considered under this policy, such difficulties must meet all of the following criteria:
 - They must be out of the student's control – the student could not have prevented them.
 - They must have had a significant impact – they must have had a demonstrably negative impact on the student's ability to study or to undertake an assessment.
 - The timing of the circumstances must be relevant to the claimed impact.
2. 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.
3. The Assessment Board shall not change, amend or estimate marks where extenuating circumstances have been accepted.
4. By submitting work for assessment, sitting an examination or otherwise engaging with summative assessment 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.
5. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel shall undertake its business in a fair, reasonable, sensible, student-focused and timely manner.
6. 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.
7. Tutors should provide support to students as appropriate, making it clear that it is the student's responsibility to complete the Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form and supply supporting evidence. Tutors must not authorise requests for extensions to submission deadlines or claims for extenuating circumstances.
8. The HE or Access Personal Support Tutor can provide advice and support to students needing to submit an application for Extenuating Circumstances and provide supporting statements for the applications.

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Late submission (does not apply to Access to HE students)

9. Students should submit all work for summative assessment by the notified deadline.
10. Work submitted up to three working days after the deadline will be accepted and marked, but the mark will be capped at the pass mark (Pass/40%) unless there is a valid reason for the late submission (i.e. having been granted an extension to the deadline or a deferral under the terms of the Extenuating Circumstances Policy).
11. Work submitted more than three working days after the deadline without valid reason will not be accepted and will be recorded as 0%.
12. Where an extension has been agreed under the terms of the Extenuating Circumstances Policy, no late submission will be permitted beyond the agreed extension period.
13. Late submission is not possible for some types of assessment, including pass/fail assessments, presentations, examinations and practical assessments. This will be indicated in the course handbook.
14. Late submission is not permitted for work that is already subject to capping at the pass mark.

Extension to assessment submission deadline

15. Extension to assessment submission deadline requests can be made on the basis of extenuating circumstances.
16. Normally the maximum length of extension to the published submission deadline is ten working days.
17. Applications for extensions must be submitted to the Degree Studies Office at least five working days in advance of the assessment deadline on the Extenuating Circumstances form.

Deferral of submission of assessment or examination

18. Students may submit claims for deferral of submission of assessment or examination on the basis of extenuating circumstances if an extension to the assessment submission deadline is not appropriate or sufficient or if the extended period requires going beyond the point a tutor can mark the work in time for the marks to be presented at an Assessment Board.
19. Applications for deferral of submission of assessment or examination must be submitted to the Degree Studies Office at least five working days in advance of the assessment deadline or examination date on the Extenuating Circumstances form.

Interruption to Period of Study (does not apply to Access to HE students)

20. Interruption to period of study is defined as an authorised interruption in studies during your course for a specific period of time, but that you intend to resume studies at a future date which has been agreed by the College. Students considering interruption to period of study should speak with their course leader and advice and support from the HE Support Tutor.

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21. Interruptions being granted 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. Students may be subject to the Fitness to Study Policy upon return.

22. It is the responsibility of the student to consider any financial or PSRB implications of Interruption to Period of Study and seek advice from an appropriate tutor or the HE Support Tutor.

23. Applications to Interruption to Period of Study on the basis of extenuating circumstances where they are not fit or able to study for an extended period should be made on the Extenuating Circumstances form as soon as possible after the circumstances that have prompted the request have occurred.

24. Normally the maximum period of Interruption to Period of Study is one academic year. An extension of a one year's Interruption to Period of Study will only be granted in exceptional evidenced circumstances, and for no more than a further academic year.

25. 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.

26. Where accepted, the date of Interruption to Period of Study will be taken as the date the application 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 Regulations for the relevant award set out the implications for the status of assessment already undertaken.

Applying for Extenuating Circumstances

27. Any student wishing to make a claim for consideration of extenuating circumstances must complete the Extenuating Circumstances form as soon as possible and no later than the deadlines detailed below. All sections of the form must be completed and supporting evidence must be sent to the Degree Studies Office.

28. Extenuating Circumstances forms and evidence must be submitted to the Degree Studies Office 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.

29. The relevant course leader will be advised that an application for extenuating circumstances has been received and will have the opportunity to provide a comment to the Extenuating Circumstances Panel if appropriate.

30. Where the Extenuating Circumstances Panel does not accept that the claim for extenuating circumstances meet the criteria, the relevant assessment regulations will be invoked.

Evidence and Grounds for Extenuating Circumstances

31. The student is responsible for providing acceptable and sufficient evidence to support claims from an independent third party. Students must authorise the College to seek verification of the evidence under the Data Protection Act.

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32. Examples of evidence that is normally acceptable or not acceptable are provided as a guide for students and staff in Appendix I.

33. Where the required evidence cannot be obtained by the deadline, students should submit the claim with a full explanation of the reasons for the lack of required evidence and an indication of when it might be available. If it is still not available when the claim is considered by the extenuating circumstances panel it will be rejected. If the evidence is submitted after the Assessment Board, but before the deadline for submitting an Academic Appeal, it may still be accepted.

34. Tutors may 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 Degree Studies Officer. In the case of applications for Interruption to Period of Study (Degree Studies at West Suffolk College student only), it is expected that students will have discussed their situation with their Course Leader before submitting a claim.

35. Evidence of 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 (Reasonable Adjustments Procedure). 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.

Extenuating Circumstances Panel

36. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel convenes on regular dates that are published annually to consider all claims for extenuating circumstances.

37. The functions of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel are:

- to establish that the evidence is valid, i.e authentic and appropriate and that it relates to the assessment in question and that it has been submitted by the required date;
- to review extenuating circumstances claims and evidence and make recommendations on outcomes for deferrals and interruption to period of study to the Assessment Board whether or not individual claims should be accepted;
- to ensure that the decisions of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel are notified to students, their tutors and Assessment Boards (as appropriate) to the timescales set out in the Extenuating Circumstances Policy;
- to make recommendations to the Academic Committee for improvements to the effectiveness and efficiency of the procedure.

38. Normally the Extenuating Circumstances Panel members will be:

Executive Dean HE (Chair)
Associate Dean Student Experience
Partnerships and Quality Manager
HE Course Leaders (2)
HE Officer (Clerk)

The Extenuating Circumstances Panel membership must comprise of a minimum on three members of staff with experience of assessment in Higher Education, including the Chair and a Clerk.

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39. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel will delegate responsibility for the approval of extensions to submission deadlines to a HE Officer. Claims for extensions to submission deadlines that are not straightforward will be considered by the full Extenuating Circumstances Panel.

Outcomes

40. Students will normally be advised of the outcome of extenuating circumstances within five working days of the relevant meeting of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel. Relevant course 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 at or prior to the Preboard.

41. For Degree Studies at West Suffolk College students only 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:

- a. 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;
- b. Permitting the student to progress within the constraints of the relevant assessment regulations for the award or to have an extension to the programme enrolment;
- c. 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.

42. For Degree Studies at West Suffolk College students only 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 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 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.

43. In the case of deferrals the Assessment Board (Degree Studies at West Suffolk College students) or Extenuating Circumstances Panel (Access to HE students) will decide the new date for submission of work or sitting of exams and the student will be informed of this along with their results that have been confirmed by the Assessment Board.

44. In extremely exceptional circumstances, an Assessment Board may, on the recommendation of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel, consider retrospective extenuating circumstances for Degree Studies at West Suffolk College students. A retrospective claim comes after an Assessment Board where a student claims 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. Extenuating Circumstances for Access to HE students cannot be considered retrospectively.

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Appeals

45. A student can use the procedures set out in the Academic Appeals Procedure to request a review of the decision of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel if there is evidence that the Extenuating Circumstances Policy and/or consideration of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel's recommendation to the Assessment Board were not followed.

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Appendix I Normally Acceptable or Unacceptable Grounds for Extenuating Circumstances

Normally acceptable	Examples
Medical certification of illness or serious accident of the student	Illness, accident or severe trauma occurring at the time of an assessment. It should be an incapacitating illness, an unexpected deterioration in an ongoing illness or chronic medical condition. It can also be an assault where the student is the victim, breaks and serious sprains of the normal writing hand/arm. Retrospective certification is not acceptable. It is recognised that it can be difficult to get timely verification from hospitals, but you should submit your claim, pending confirmation.
Death certificate for recent (< month) death of someone close	"Close" can mean parents (and 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.
Medical certification of the serious illness of a close relative	For a case of an unforeseen accident or serious deterioration.
Independent verification of serious personal disruption	Fire, burglary, requirement to appear in Court etc relevant to the date of the assessment event or the period leading up to it. Supporting third-party evidence must be provided. Travel problems are not normally accepted as students are expected to plan ahead.
Employer letter providing evidence of significant change of employment circumstances.	This will normally only be accepted for an extension to a submission date, not the deferral of the assignment or an examination event.
Corroboration from Disability Advisor	If evidence of special needs is provided too late to be taken into account in the delivery or assessment of the module.
Religious Observance and scheduled examinations	To enable consideration, one or more of the following pieces of evidence should be submitted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a letter from a religious leader explaining the nature of the obligation and the way in which it impacts on the student; a personal statement by the student explaining the nature of the obligation and the way in which it impacts on their timetable supported by a published timetable of festivals or events showing the date, time and nature of the observance.

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NOT normally acceptable	Examples
Alleged medical conditions without supporting evidence	Claims will not be accepted without appropriate medical evidence.
Social activities	Hectic social life, parties, visits by/to friends, sporting fixtures.
Temporary self-induced conditions	Hangovers, drug taking (unless possibly for a registered medical user influenced by the medical treatment involved) including prescribed medication for certain conditions where it is known that there may be adverse reactions e.g. drowsiness.
Minor ailments and other conditions	Coughs, colds, sore throats, sprains (other than in the writing hand/arm). Long-standing medical conditions for which special arrangements could have been made or treatment anticipated and taken. Accidents/illness affecting relatives or friends unless serious or the student is the sole carer.
Examination stress	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.
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 (exceptional crises at work might be acceptable), failed travel arrangements, illness of pets, oversleeping, misreading examinations timetable or other assessment details, poor time management, taking the wrong examination
Study-related	Computer difficulties, losing work not backed up on computer disk, deadline congestion, examination congestion, missing books, examination rescheduling, late distribution of materials by the department, delays in printing, photocopying and/or binding of assessed work.

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