



# Queen Margaret University

## EDINBURGH

### EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

#### GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS AND STAFF

This document provides guidance to students and staff on the definition and consideration of claims for 'extenuating circumstances', and on the procedures for submitting a claim under these guidelines.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the QMU Academic Appeals Procedures and the section on 'Assessment' contained within the University Governance and Regulations. Copies of both are available at <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/about-the-university/quality/committees-regulations-policies-and-procedures/>

#### 1 INTRODUCTION – SOME IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES

The University's procedures for the consideration of extenuating circumstances seek to ensure that all students are treated fairly, are not disadvantaged by circumstances **beyond their control**, and that the standards of the University's awards are maintained.

It is accepted that, from time to time, circumstances **beyond a student's control** may affect her/his ability to undertake assessment on time, or may affect her/his performance in assessment. It is also recognised that assessment periods can be stressful. However, students need to be able to plan and manage their time and their workload, to meet deadlines, to cope with a certain level of stress, and to manage their University studies alongside other responsibilities in life.

All students have a responsibility to manage their learning, revision and assessment activities throughout each semester or assessment period. It is essential that students plan carefully and manage workloads throughout this time, and do not leave too much coursework, learning, revision or similar activities to be undertaken late in the semester or assessment period. Similarly, when examinations are to be taken at the end of a semester or assessment period, students should conduct revision throughout the semester, and not limit it to the period shortly before sitting examinations.

It is also essential to recognise that illnesses and difficult life events do occur, and that it is a normal part of life to have to manage these and continue with work or study.

#### 2 WHAT WOULD BE ACCEPTED AS 'EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES'?

Extenuating circumstances are defined as:

*"circumstances beyond the student's control which either prevent the student from submitting a piece of course work or sitting an examination, or cause the student to perform less well in his or her course work or examinations than he or she might otherwise have been expected to do (on the basis of other work)."*

The term is used to describe those circumstances that cause exceptional interference with academic performance, and which are over and above the normal difficulties experienced in life.

In general, though not exclusively, extenuating circumstances will be of a medical or personal nature affecting the student for a period of time and/or during the assessment period. These are normally circumstances that have prevented the student from demonstrating, or acquiring, the skills, knowledge or competencies associated with a particular module(s). This would include circumstances preventing attendance at an examination, or adversely affecting performance at an examination, or preventing work from being submitted by the deadline set. Examples would include, but would not be limited to, illness, accident, or bereavement.

The University does not normally consider medical certificates for long-standing controlled conditions, or self-limiting illness, as evidence in support of extenuating circumstances affecting performance. Students in this category would normally have had the benefit of experience, medical knowledge or help to control the condition or illness, and would normally have registered with the Disability Adviser, and be working to an agreed Learning Plan. It follows that such students should contact the Disability Adviser at an early point so that these circumstances can be recorded and appropriate arrangements put in place, in line with QMU's disability policy statement. Further information may be found in the Student Handbook and on the University's website at <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/study-here/student-services/disability-service/>

The University normally disregards circumstances which students are expected to cope with as part of a properly managed workload, or as part of the normal issues and difficulties that arise as part of life. Circumstances which would not be acceptable are those where a student could reasonably have avoided the situation, or acted to limit the impact of the circumstances.

The following are examples of circumstances which would NOT fall within the University's definition of "extenuating circumstances":

- completing coursework too late and missing deadlines because of computer; difficulties, or transport difficulties;
- general pressure of work;
- normal work commitments on behalf of an employer;
- having more than one examination on the same day or on consecutive days (unless the student was already suffering from illness or injury)
- missing an examination due to misreading the timetable or oversleeping;
- losing work not backed up on external storage
- theft of home computer – students are expected to make a back up copy of all work on, which should be stored separately from the computer.
- failure to make alternative travel plans when disruptions were advised in advance;
- a short-term problem or illness which has occurred during the year and which is deemed not to have had an overall effect on the student's performance; e.g. common colds
- where extenuating circumstances have affected the student throughout their time at QMU [on the basis that it would be difficult to determine what her/his marks might have been like otherwise];
- insufficient computers/printers to do the work [a claim submitted upon this basis would not be supported on the grounds that it indicated lack of advance planning];

Failure of IT would be accepted only in limited circumstances. There may be occasions when, due to unforeseen circumstances, the University's own computer/IT equipment is unavailable for use. If this happens students may request confirmation from Information Services of this, including the time period and the date(s) of its unavailability. However, it would be reasonable to expect a student to submit the latest draft of their work from a few days prior to the deadline to support their claim.

### **3 WHEN SHOULD A CLAIM FOR EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES BE SUBMITTED?**

It is important that students report **in advance** any circumstances that they anticipate will affect their performance in assessment.

Students who know that they will be unable to meet the deadline for coursework, or attend an examination – due to circumstances beyond their control – should complete a Extenuating Circumstances Claim, with supporting evidence via the QMU Portal in good time, so that the potential implications can be considered.

The claim for extenuating circumstances will be considered at this stage by the Programme Leader. If the circumstances are deemed valid and there is time to redeem the situation (e.g. through an extension to deadline for submission of coursework), the authority to agree this rests with the Programme Leader.

It follows therefore, that the only claims for extenuating circumstances which can normally be considered **after** the assessment date – either the date of the examination or the deadline date for submission of coursework – are those where it can be demonstrated that the student was affected by an accident or sudden illness, or other circumstances which occurred on or immediately before the day in question and which were entirely beyond the student's control.

If it is not possible to redeem the situation [e.g. where the examination was part of a timetable diet of examinations], then the Programme Leader will advise the student concerned, and the claim for extenuating circumstances will be put forward to the relevant Extenuating Circumstances Panel [see section below].

**It is the student's responsibility to ensure that their claim is submitted in sufficient time for the appropriate Extenuating Circumstances Panel, normally no later than one week before the meeting.** The dates of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel together with details on how to submit a claim/evidence will be notified to students each semester via the Moderator email message system.

Failure to submit a form in advance of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel, without valid cause, will mean that the student may not subsequently appeal against their results on the grounds of extenuating circumstances. It is the student's responsibility to explain fully the impact of extenuating circumstances on their work/performance. If this is not explained sufficiently, then the student may not subsequently appeal and ask the Board of Examiners to consider additional information.

### **4 WHAT EVIDENCE SHOULD BE SUBMITTED WITH THE CLAIM**

A claim for extenuating circumstances must be submitted via the QMU Portal.

The claim form should be accompanied by supporting evidence, in writing, from an appropriate authority. A claim is unlikely to be upheld without appropriate supporting evidence. Individual circumstances will dictate the nature of the evidence required to support a claim.

Examples of Evidence (this list is for illustrative purposes only and is not exhaustive)

<b>Extenuating Circumstance</b>	<b>Examples of the type of evidence that are likely to support an EC request</b>
Bereavement	The EC application must also state the student's relationship to the deceased. It is unlikely that further professional evidence detailing the effects on the student will be required.
<p>crisis</p> <p>A serious short term illness (physical or mental) or accident</p>	<p>Letter from a health professional such as a GP, psychiatrist or mental health counsellor confirming the diagnosis and stating an opinion as to the nature and duration of any impact on the student; medical certificate; prescription; hospital admissions record; photographs of injuries (ideally identifying the student with the photograph). Evidence such as a photograph, prescription or admissions record, does not necessarily specify the negative affect on the student's ability to complete their assessment(s), where possible and relevant, evidence from a suitable health professional detailing these effects should also be submitted.</p> <p>Any evidence that only records the student's self-reporting of the health problems will normally be deemed insufficient.</p>
Unforeseen recent illness of dependents or close family members	Medical certificate or GP's letter relating to the dependent/family member confirming the recent sudden or severe nature of the illness.
A long-term health condition worsening	<p>Medical certificate or GP's letter reporting the specific deterioration or sudden change and the time period it applies to. The evidence should refer to how the change in conditions has impacted on the student.</p> <p>Evidence simply confirming the long-term condition without mentioning recent deterioration will be normally deemed insufficient.</p>
Health condition where reasonable adjustments are not yet in place	Letter or e-mail from the University's Student Support Services confirming that the delay in support was beyond the student's control.
Victim of a serious crime	<p>Police crime number, legal letters, crime report from the police or other investigating authority; an insurance claim. Since such evidence does not refer to the impact of the event on the student, further evidence may also be required for ECs claimed to have affected the student for more than a week.</p> <p>Claims relating to injuries or trauma suffered as a result of a motor traffic accident would normally be considered as a medical circumstance and require suitable medical evidence as outlined above.</p>

Legal proceedings requiring court attendance	Letter from a solicitor/legal officer or official court communication.
Representative participation in a national or international cultural or sports event	Formal notification from the relevant official body or bodies involved. Although independent professional third party evidence outlining the impact on the student's preparation and completion of the assessment may be supplied, it is likely that impact on the student may be reasonably inferred.
Exceptional and unforeseeable transport difficulties	Evidence of a major transportation incident from a relevant and appropriate source (including media reports). Evidence will also need to demonstrate that the student was both affected and that there was no reasonable means of foreseeing or overcoming the difficulties.
Significant adverse recent personal/family circumstances	Independent professional third party evidence describing the circumstances, time period affected and the impact on the student. Where this is not possible, sufficient detail should be submitted so that the likely effects can be reasonably inferred.

Normally, students should seek corroborating information from an independent person, organisation or support service that could provide verification. Acceptable supporting evidence would normally be an original document written and signed by an appropriate third party, giving details of the circumstance, its duration, and, where possible, its impact. An appropriate third party would be one who knows the student in a professional capacity or one who can verify the circumstance from a position of authority (e.g. police officer, solicitor, GP, University Counsellor) and who is in a position to provide objective and impartial evidence. Letters from family members and fellow students are not normally accepted. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for a member of the academic staff to provide a supporting statement.

Dates of evidence must correspond with the extenuating circumstances detailed.

If a student has missed an assignment through ill health, then the illness must coincide with the preparation, writing or deadline of that assessment.

Students, who miss an examination or an invigilated test due to illness or are claiming to have been affected by medical problems during examination, should seek medical attention at the time of their illness where possible. For periods of illness lasting more than 5 days, the student should submit a medical certificate [see below].

Self-certification (short illness lasting 1 - 5 consecutive days) may be accepted to support absence from lectures, classes and examinations. It is not normally accepted in respect of failure to complete coursework by its due date, as coursework schedules normally allow more than five days - often a period of weeks - for the coursework to be completed.

In periods of illness lasting more than 5 days, a medical certificate must be provided. The certificate must relate specifically to the dates and duration of the illness, contain a clear

medical diagnosis or opinion and not merely report a student's claim that they were unwell. Doctors are entitled to charge for any medical certificates or notes they provide, and may not always provide certificates for *short* periods of illness. A doctor's note must be on headed paper and/or stamped by the surgery.

Medical Certification must normally be submitted within 7 days of the assessment due date.

If a student has an extenuating circumstance of an unusually delicate or personal nature that they do not wish to document **in detail**, then the student may elect to discuss with his/her Personal Academic Tutor or Student Counsellor who will confirm to the Programme Leader that the student has submitted a valid claim. This will ensure that the Programme Leader can consider the claim without knowing all the details.

## 5 WHAT MIGHT THE OUTCOME BE?

A claim for extenuating circumstances submitted in advance of an assessment is not an alternative to undertaking the necessary assessment, but, if successful, will normally result in the student being provided with an opportunity to undertake the assessment at a future date. The option remains for students to submit coursework up to one week after the published deadline date, without a claim for extenuating circumstances, on the basis that the maximum mark which can then be awarded is 40% for undergraduate or 50% for postgraduate modules.

Where a claim has been submitted after an assessment deadline, or where an examination has been missed, and there is no opportunity to redeem the situation [e.g. by an extension to a deadline] or where a claim is submitted on the basis of diminished performance in an exam or assessment, the Extenuating Circumstances Panel will come to a judgement.

The Extenuating Circumstances Panel will try to ensure a fair result based on overall performance. It may take a number of actions.

For example, if a student has missed an examination, and the Extenuating Circumstances Panel considers the reasons to be valid, it can treat the absence in a number of ways.

Where the claim is in respect of diminished performance as a direct result of the extenuating circumstance, the Extenuating Circumstances Panel will try to determine whether, and to what extent, extenuating circumstances have affected a student's academic performance, and determine what action, if any, can be taken. In assessing the significance of extenuating circumstances Extenuating Circumstances Panels will normally take into account:

- the severity of the problem and the length of time involved;
- any supporting documentary evidence;
- whether all work in the same period appears to have been equally affected;
- whether it is possible to gauge the effect of the extenuating circumstances upon academic performance;
- whether achievement is consistent with past performance;
- the type of assessment affected, and how the student had to complete the work (i.e. date when work set and deadline for submission).

Extenuating Circumstances Panel will not give extra marks because a student's work has been affected by extenuating circumstances, nor will they amend marks from previous years of study, or annotate the statement of results/transcripts with comments about the existence of extenuating circumstances.

The Extenuating Circumstances Panel may decide that the student is given the opportunity to submit for further assessment in the module (or component of module) against which they have claimed extenuating circumstances. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel may also decide not to uphold the claim on the basis that the student has not made a case, that the supporting evidence does not support the claim, or that the student had no good reason for not advising of the circumstances prior to the assessment or examination for which extenuating circumstances are sought.

A claim for extenuating circumstances, which has been considered by the Board, may not be submitted again under the academic appeals procedures. If a claim for extenuating circumstances forms the basis of an academic appeal, the student will need to demonstrate why they did not follow the procedures for submitting a claim for extenuating circumstances in advance of the Board of Examiners.

## **6 FALSE CLAIMS**

The submission of a false claim may be regarded as an attempt to gain unfair advantage, which would be an academic offence and could be dealt with under the QMU Disciplinary Procedures.

## **7 DATA PROTECTION**

In submitting an extenuating circumstances form, students agree to the University holding this personal data for the purposes of processing their claim. The University will hold this data in accordance with its notification under the General Data Protection Regulations 2018.

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