

4. EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

4.1 Introduction

1. Students must undertake a wide range of assessments in different formats. This requires them to balance their workload and use time management skills to ensure that assessments are submitted to stated deadlines. However, the University recognises that serious adverse factors beyond a student's control (extenuating circumstances) can prevent them from completing assessments; this procedure enables them to be taken into account when considering a student's assessment profile.
2. The aim of these procedures is to:
 - make clear the types of serious adverse factors that the University will consider as extenuating circumstances and the process to be followed for dealing with them; and
 - ensure fair and equal treatment of all students when considering extenuating circumstances.
3. Students can download the Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form and find all the related information in the [Registry Documents](#) section on Learning Space. All forms should be submitted to Registry Services by the published deadlines and should be accompanied by documentary evidence. Decisions of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel are emailed to students as soon as possible after its meeting.

4.2 Definition

1. The University defines extenuating circumstances as: **“Critical matters that result in a major short-term impact on a student's ability to be able to**

complete, or submit, or attend, an assessment.” Extenuating circumstances can therefore be either:

- immediate events that prevent a student attending for, or submitting, an assessment; or
 - preliminary events that impact on a student’s ability to prepare for an assessment.
2. These procedures are not intended for students who have suffered long term difficulties that have prevented learning, except if they are registered with the Disability and Inclusion Advice Service (DIAS) in Student Support and have an approved request for flexibility with deadlines. Students whose circumstances exceed twenty working days must, therefore, discuss the matter with the Academic Information and Guidance Co-ordinator so that they can be supported.
 3. These procedures are intended to apply to individuals. They do not apply when a failure in programme management arrangements has disrupted the learning and assessment of a group or groups of students. In such cases, the Director of School and the programme team should provide appropriate remedies, taking advice from the University Secretary and Registrar. If those remedies are unsatisfactory, students may use the complaints procedure at Section 17 of this Framework.

4.3 The ‘Fit to Sit’ Principle

1. The University operates a ‘fit to sit’ approach to extenuating circumstances. This acknowledges that only the individual student concerned, with advice from others where appropriate, can know if an event has impacted upon his/her ability to undertake an assessment. Thus a student confirms that she or he is ‘fit to sit’ by submitting an assessment or sitting an examination and a subsequent claim will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, where a student is unable to reasonably make the required judgement.

2. It follows that students should only try to meet learning outcomes when they are fully fit to do so. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel will not judge the impact of particular circumstances on any individual, but will either accept that the evidence presented by the student meets the criteria or that it does not; if it does not, the claim will be rejected.
3. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel makes a recommendation to the Module Assessment Board that deals with the relevant module. Where there are valid extenuating circumstances, Module Assessment Boards must waive the assessment penalty, provided the work was submitted within ten working days of the due date of submission, and ensure the assessment attracts the full mark it merits. Students may not submit a further extenuating circumstances claim within this period to extend the time further, but this deadline may be varied exceptionally to take account of student vacations.
4. Where a student cannot submit the assessment within ten working days but has Valid Extenuating Circumstances, so that no mark is recorded for an assessment, Module Assessment Boards may:
 - permit the assessment of the module in the form of the affected assessment(s) to be deferred until specified dates;
 - exceptionally, if the same type of assessment cannot be used again, permit a different assessment(s), which must be defined and made known to the student, to be deferred until specified dates. Some assessments (for example, some professional placements) must be repeated exactly and may not, therefore, be available in defined resit/deferral periods. Students will be informed about such assessments in the programme handbook.
 - refuse to permit a deferred assessment if the student cannot pass the affected module by doing only the deferral work. In this case the Module Assessment Board will not offer the student a deferral and the decision will be made as if the extenuating circumstances were not valid.

4.4 Evidence Base

1. To be fair and transparent, applications for extenuating circumstances must be evidence based and judged within clearly defined guidelines. This also helps students who are not fit to undertake an assessment to understand the nature of the evidence required. The areas that are valid for extenuating circumstances, and the supporting evidence required, are stated in Section 4.5 of this Framework. Students should ask the Academic Information and Guidance Co-ordinator or the President or Deputy President of the Student Union for advice on how to apply and their chances of success. Supporting evidence must refer directly to how the extenuating circumstances have impacted upon the student's ability to complete or sit assessments.
2. A statement from a parent/guardian/spouse/partner will not be accepted as independent corroboration. Similarly, a statement from an academic member of staff will not be accepted without the appropriate documentary confirmation.
3. All evidence should be in English. Where, for example, a student is taken ill in their home country and corroborating evidence is provided in the language of that country, then it should be accompanied by a translation, certified officially as being accurate as advised by Registry Services.
4. Extenuating circumstances cover critical incidences and do not encompass normal life challenges. Thus the following incidences will not be valid under these procedures:
 - the down-time of University computer networks for short periods and problems with personal IT equipment;
 - loss of computer data, which should be backed-up;
 - erroneous e-submission, including e-submission to an incorrect module code;
 - ongoing, rather than emergency, accommodation problems;
 - personal/part-time job commitments;

- holidays;
- peaks in assessment work demands;
- financial difficulties;
- long-term illness or other incapacity lasting more than 4 weeks, for which students are advised to contact the Academic Information and Guidance Co-ordinator to discuss a possible interruption of studies;
- additional learning needs;
- complaints against individual members of staff, or complaints about the delivery of the module/programme, which are managed through the University's Complaints Procedure (see [Section 17 of this Framework](#)).

4.5 Extenuating Circumstances and Valid Evidence

The following general principles apply to the extenuating circumstances procedure:

- Extenuating circumstances cannot be valid for more than twenty working days.
- Evidence must include specific dates for the period of the claim and should correspond with the dates recorded on the claim form.

The different categories applicable and the types of evidence which will be required to support each claim are as follows:

Category A - Acute Illness or injury (less than five working days)

An acute illness is likely to have incapacitated the student on the date the assessment was due to have been undertaken or submitted. This includes personal injury or accident.

Such an illness may also result from an acute episode of a chronic condition for which the student may already have additional needs provision, but the effect has been more severe than normal.

Evidence Required

Medical Certificate signed while the illness or incident was affecting the student;

OR

The student's self-certification of illness or incapacity for a single period of up to 7 consecutive days; OR

Confirmation from DIAS via an Acute Episode form that the student is known to them and has had an exacerbation of an existing condition.

The Extenuating Circumstances Panel will normally consider this form of evidence to be Not Valid if used more than once in any academic year unless in relation to additional needs provision. This type of evidence may be provided on Self-Certification stationery or may take the form of a signed and dated statement by the student. Please note that hospital appointment letters are insufficient evidence of the impact of circumstances and must be supplied alongside other evidence.

Category B - Extended Illness or injury (less than twenty working days)

An illness that is likely to have incapacitated the student during the period he/she might have reasonably been expected to spend time on preparation for submission or for sitting an assessment. This encompasses personal injury/accident with extended impact.

Such an illness may also result from an acute episode of a chronic condition for which the student may already have additional needs provision, but the effect has been more severe than normal and for a period of longer than Category A.

Evidence Required

A doctor's medical certificate relevant to the period of the claimed extenuating circumstances and stating that the student was unfit to study. Evidence of hospitalisation, e.g. Discharge Notice. Please note that hospital appointment letters are insufficient evidence of the impact of circumstances and must be supplied alongside other evidence.

Category C - Illness or injury affecting another person

Acute illness, injury, or incident or exacerbation of long term or chronic condition, affecting another person or persons and which required the close and frequent attention of the student on the date the assessment was due to be undertaken or submitted, and could not have been reasonably supplied by anyone else.

Evidence Required

Medical Certificate signed while the illness or incident was affecting the other person, or some other medical evidence e.g. Hospital Discharge Notice or copies of prescriptions, together with a statement by the student about the nature of the relationship, explaining why their personal attention was necessary and why no-one else could have reasonably provided it. Please note that hospital appointment letters are insufficient evidence of the impact of circumstances and must be supplied alongside other evidence.

Category D - Bereavement

Death of immediate member of family, partner, or close friend on or close to the date the assessment was due to be undertaken or submitted or during the period the student might reasonably have been expected to work on it.

Evidence Required

Copy Death Certificate, Order of Funeral Service or newspaper article or announcement.

Category E - Personal Problems

Severe problems in the student's domestic or personal circumstances that would have prevented the student submitting an assessment on time or sitting an assessment OR which would have impacted severely on the student's ability to prepare for an assessment.

Evidence Required

Corroboration from a person with whom the student has a professional, not a personal, relationship e.g. a doctor or other health professional, a counsellor or other appropriate member of Student Support, or some other professional person who, through the nature of their professional relationship with the student, knows about his or her difficulties and can confirm the claim.

A supporting letter from a member of academic staff relating what the student has told them will not normally be accepted.

Category F - Court Attendance

Jury Service, or attendance at Court or a Tribunal as a witness, defendant or plaintiff, on the date the assessment was due to be submitted or assessment sat OR

impacting on the period during which the student might reasonably have been expected to prepare for submission or revise for the assessment.

Evidence Required

Official correspondence from the Court or Tribunal confirming attendance requirement.

Category G - Work Commitment

Student must be studying part-time or by distance learning AND there must be an unanticipated and/or non-negotiable work commitment that either meant that the student was unable to attend on the date the assessment was due to be undertaken or submitted, or that the student was unable to work on the assessment during the relevant period.

Evidence Required

Letter of corroboration (that must explain why the commitment was non-negotiable and/or unanticipated) signed by the student's line manager or supervisor, or by an appropriately senior and authorised representative of the relevant organisation.

Category H - Cultural or Sporting Event

Student taking part as an individual or member of a team in an externally-organised cultural or sporting event which required absence from the University on the date the assessment was due to be undertaken or submitted, or for at least a week during the period she/he might reasonably have been expected to work on the assessment.

Evidence Required

Letter of invitation from a recognised organisation to the event or to join a team in an international event.

Students are advised to consult the Academic Information and Guidance Co-ordinator before accepting such an invitation.

Category J - Religious Observance

Observance of the student's religion as a result of which she/he is unable to attend the University at the date and time the assessment was due to be undertaken or submitted, and no alternative and reasonable arrangements could be agreed by the University.

Evidence Required

Confirmation from the University Chaplain that the religious observance is a reasonable one for a member of the faith, subject to consultation with the Head of Student Support and/or Inclusion Co-ordinator with regard to non-Christian faiths, AND a statement from the student explaining why the observance in question prevented their attendance and explaining what attempts had been made to agree a reasonable alternative arrangement.

Category K - Active Exercise of Citizenship

An unanticipated and/or non-negotiable commitment to duties associated with an elected office, membership of a voluntary organisation, or service with Reserve Forces, as a result of which, either the student was unable to attend on the date the assessment was due to be undertaken or submitted, or the student was unable to give time to the production of the assessment during the relevant period.

Evidence Required

Letter of corroboration that must explain why the commitment was non-negotiable and/or unanticipated, signed by the student's line manager or supervisor, or by an appropriately senior and authorised representative of the relevant organisation.

Category L - Transport Difficulties

Difficulties with public or personal transport which prevented attendance on the date the assessment was due to be undertaken or submitted, that could not reasonably have been anticipated and gave insufficient time for alternative arrangements to be made.

Evidence Required

Corroboration from a relevant and appropriate source.

Category M - Criminal Activity

The student was the victim of a crime that has been reported to the appropriate authority for investigation and that crime was likely either to have prevented the student's attendance on the date the assessment was due to be undertaken, or to have prevented the student from submitting the assessment on the due date.

Evidence Required

Corroboration of the reported crime from the Police or other investigating authority.

Category N - Computing Difficulties

Computing difficulties arising on computers or a network provided by the University for the purpose of a timed assessment such as a formal examination.

Evidence Required

Corroboration by the University's IT Services and Infrastructure Manager.

Category Q - Other

Exceptional extenuating circumstances that do not fall under any of the criteria defined above, including maternity and paternity. Students are advised to consult the Academic Information and Guidance Co-ordinator before submitting such a claim.

Evidence Required

The Academic Information and Guidance Co-ordinator will seek advice from the Extenuating Circumstances Administrators in Registry Services to determine what evidence would be appropriate, in the context of precedent and subject to the advice of the University Secretary and Registrar, to support such a claim. In the case of maternity and paternity, a birth certificate would be sufficient.

4.6 Timing of an Extenuating Circumstances Submission

1. An extenuating circumstances submission must normally be made by the end of the semester or term to which it relates. Submissions that relate to years already completed will not be considered.
2. Common deadlines for the submission of completed forms and evidence are published annually via the Assessments Calendar. However, students should submit claims as early as possible and by no later than the published deadline, particularly with regard to major assessment tasks such as dissertations and ISMs, so that a decision can be made promptly.

4.7 Extenuating Circumstances Panels

1. The University Secretary and Registrar, as Chair of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel, can approve an extenuating circumstances claim that is clearly valid under University Regulations and established case law. Otherwise, it must be considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel. The Panel will receive a full report of all students under consideration, including those where Chair's Action has already been taken.
2. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel will have a quorum of three persons, with a gender balance where possible, as follows:
 - The University Secretary and Registrar (Chair)
 - A representative of Student Support (normally the Academic Information and Guidance Co-ordinator)
 - Director of School or nominee
 - In attendance: A secretary to the panel, who shall be an administrative member of Registry Services staff.
3. The University Secretary and Registrar may also convene a virtual Panel, outside formal meetings, to consider additional evidence and agree the

outcome of a claim. All such claims accepted must be reported to the Panel at the next available opportunity.

4. The Panel's decisions will be determined by the nature of the circumstances, the documentary evidence provided and the alignment with the requirements of Section 4.5 of this Framework.
5. If necessary, the Panel will request further evidence from the student, but it will not interview students as part of the decision-making process.
6. The student will be advised of the Panel's decision. If it decides that a submission is Not Valid the reasons for this will be stated.
7. The Panel's decisions inform the Module Assessment Boards and Progression and Award Boards. Appeals can only be made on the grounds set out in the academic appeals process described in Section 16 of this Framework.

4.8 Serious and Confidential Extenuating Circumstances

1. If a student would like serious extenuating circumstances to remain confidential, she or he may seek the advice of an appropriate member of staff who will decide whether or not the circumstances are both serious and confidential.
2. If satisfied that the circumstance is valid, the member of staff will report to the Extenuating Circumstances Panel that there is a serious and confidential extenuating circumstance which has affected specific assessments in named modules.
3. In such a case, the Panel will accept this intervention and the minute shall record only:
 - the student's name;
 - the name of the member of staff:

- the fact that the serious and confidential procedure has been applied;
- which modules and which assessments have been affected.

4.9 Intervention on a Student's Behalf

1. Exceptionally, for example due to the incapacity of the student, written statements on a student's behalf may be considered at the discretion of the Chair of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel. The student will need to consent to this, unless the circumstances themselves have made it impossible for the student to give consent, and the submission must make it clear how that consent has been given.
2. No other intervention on behalf of a student, except as set out in Section 4.8 of this Framework above, will be considered and the circumstances will therefore be Not Valid.
3. Where a written statement or other intervention on a student's behalf is made the Chair of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel will ensure that the minute records:
 - the intervention involved;
 - the reasons for its consideration;
 - the decision of the Panel and the modules and assessments affected.
4. Registry Services will inform the person making the intervention and the student of the Panel's decision.

4.10 Data Protection Act 2018

By submitting an extenuating circumstances form, students agree to the University holding this personal data in accordance with its Records Retention

Policy and its obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018, which aligns with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

4.11 Support for Students

1. Plymouth Marjon University places great emphasis on supporting its students. The University recognises that students who have recourse to these procedures may require additional support. Students are therefore encouraged to seek advice from Student Support which includes professional counsellors available via Student Support and the Academic Information and Guidance Co-ordinator; from their Personal Development Tutor; or from the Student Union.
2. During the course of their studies students may also experience personal issues that hamper their ability to learn, or undertake assessments, but do not meet the criteria for extenuating circumstances. In all such cases students should contact those identified above.

4.12 Procedures at Partner Organisations

All arrangements on collaborative programmes relating to extenuating circumstances are expected to align with those of the University.

4.13 Misrepresentation and falsehood

By submitting a claim, students certify that the information they have provided is true and complete, and that misrepresentation or falsehood related to extenuating circumstances may lead to the application of the Student Misconduct Procedures. The Extenuating Circumstances procedure is intended to be supportive and claims will be treated in good faith by University

staff. Students are encouraged to seek advice from Student Support or Registry Services if they have any queries about a claim.

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