

Chapter 5 Deferral of assessment on grounds of extenuating circumstances

The assessment of work is an important milestone in a student's academic career. Assessments have to be scheduled for certain times during the University year, but the University accepts that it is possible that, on exceptional occasions, an individual student's performance may be seriously impaired by severely adverse personal circumstances. In such cases, it is fair to defer the assessment until a later time and/or to disregard the mark awarded if the student completed the original assessment at a time when his or her performance was seriously impaired by adverse personal circumstances.

Notes

Deferrals should not be seen as an opportunity for students to request deferrals in assessments of their choice to enable them to improve on their performance at the next sitting. Normally the University would expect deferrals due to on-going circumstances to be for all assessments in the period affected by the circumstances on which a deferral request is made.

The deferral of assessments is not an appropriate measure in respect of permanent or long-term conditions. Students with prolonged chronic illnesses or disabilities should instead contact Disability Advice and Support in Student & Academic Services for advice, which might include special arrangements in examinations or interruption of studies. Examples of such chronic conditions may include asthma, allergies, mental health difficulties or migraine.

Students are expected to take deferred assessments at the next available opportunity as per the instructions from their Faculty.

Extenuating circumstances will not be considered by the University after a student's marks (and/or award) have been verified by an Assessment Board and officially released to the student.¹

1 Definitions

- 1.1 **Deferral of assessment** occurs when a student has permission from the University to take an assessment at a later date than scheduled, without it having an effect on his or her re-sit opportunities. This will be when the assessment is next normally offered, or, in the case of coursework or assignments, as determined by the relevant Panel (see paragraph 3 below).
- 1.2 **Deferrals are time-limited.** If a student does not take the deferred assessment when it is next offered or when required by the relevant Panel, the deferral will be withdrawn and the student will be failed in the deferred assessment(s) with a mark of 0. Notwithstanding the above, a deferral Panel may exceptionally determine otherwise or extend the term of the deferral following a further application from the student.
- 1.3 **Extenuating circumstances** are genuine circumstances beyond a student's control or ability to foresee, and which seriously impair his or her assessed work.

¹ Please refer to Chapter 8 of these Regulations for further information.

1.4 The above definition excludes cases where a whole examination may be affected by exceptional circumstances, such as serious disruption in an examination room. Such exceptional events are considered by the Assessment Boards concerned.

1.5 Criteria for considering requests for deferral

The student must provide time relevant evidence of circumstances relating directly to a stated assessment or assessments. In order to demonstrate that the circumstances fulfil the definition of genuine circumstances beyond a student's control or ability to foresee, which seriously impair his or her assessed work, they must demonstrate the following degree of seriousness:

- Serious illness or death of a member of the immediate family; normally a parent or guardian, child, brother, sister, spouse or partner.
- An episode of a serious debilitating illness involving an authorised absence from study of at least three weeks, for example to undertake a course of chemotherapy.
- A serious accident or acute illness occurring immediately before or at the time of the assessments concerned.
- An acute or sudden change to a long-term condition.
- Other unforeseen circumstances, of equivalent weight, that have seriously disrupted the ability to study, for example the need to care for a very ill child over a number of weeks.

Circumstances such as the following would not be acceptable to the Panel:

- Minor illness (such as a cold), manageable illness or indisposition, or injury not falling within the definition of serious debilitating illness or serious accident or acute illness as stated above.
- Circumstances arising from paid employment.
- Circumstances which arise from negligence or carelessness, for example failure by the student to get up on time, failure to attend at the right time or location for an examination.
- Circumstances which could have been avoided by good planning, for example holiday or travel arrangements, including allowance for delays and cancellations.

The lists above are examples of acceptable and unacceptable circumstances in relation to requests for deferral, but they do **not** represent an exhaustive definition of such circumstances.

2 Rights and responsibilities

2.1 Rights and responsibilities of students

- 2.1.1 Any student has the right to draw the attention of the University to personal extenuating circumstances which seriously impair his or her assessed work, and to request deferral of the assessment. The student must, however, do so in accordance with the Regulations and with the University procedures outlined below.
- 2.1.2 It is the student's responsibility to ensure that requests for deferral on grounds of extenuating circumstances are made on the form devised for the purpose, available from Faculty Offices, the university website and from Student & Academic Services. The form must clearly list each assessment for which deferral is being requested and be personally signed by the student before submission.
- 2.1.3 It is the student's responsibility to obtain the evidence required to allow the Panel to reach a decision. The University will require time relevant third-party evidence to support the student's own claims for deferral. The student is responsible for attaching documentary evidence to, and submitting it with, the request form. Retrospective medical certificates will normally only be accepted if the student consulted the doctor at the time of the illness and this is stated by the doctor on the certificate.

In relation to examinations, it is expected that any evidence submitted from a doctor or other health care professional will contain a clear medical opinion that the illness/condition cited will affect the student's performance on the date of the examination(s) concerned. A letter stating that a student reported (to the doctor) that they were unable to attend an examination will not normally be accepted as appropriate third-party evidence.

If it is not possible to include the relevant third party evidence at the time the form is handed in, the form should still be submitted before the stated deadline with a note to say that supporting evidence will follow. In any event, the evidence must be submitted before assessment results are published. Submission of a deferral request form after the release of assessment results will not be accepted.

Note that students who submit false or fraudulent documentation will be subject to the University's disciplinary procedures. The University reserves the right to contact third parties for the purposes of verifying supporting documentary evidence.

- 2.1.4 The student has the right to submit supporting evidence in confidence. It is normally in a student's interests for extenuating circumstances to be discussed by the full Panel. However, it may be that a student wishes supporting evidence of an exceptionally sensitive or personal nature to be seen only by the Chair of the Panel. If so the supporting evidence must be placed in a sealed envelope marked 'Confidential: from (student's name)' and addressed to the Chair of the appropriate Panel, clearly marked 'Extenuating Circumstances' and attached to the form.

The Chair of the Panel will read the confidential evidence and inform the Panel, at its meeting, that confidential evidence has been received. The Chair will give the Panel his or her opinion on the seriousness and relevance of the evidence, but will not disclose the material without the permission of the student.

- 2.1.5 It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the form is submitted to the appropriate office as follows:

Students on undergraduate programmes:

- Requests for deferral of formal examinations must be submitted to Student & Academic Services.
- Requests for deferral of coursework and faculty based tests (such as phase tests) must be submitted to the Faculty Office.

Students on taught postgraduate programmes:

- Requests for deferral of formal examinations must be submitted to Student & Academic Services.
- Requests for deferral of coursework must be submitted to the Faculty Office.

Forms should be submitted as close in time as possible to the circumstances which they describe and must be received by the deadlines stated in section 3.2.1 below, unless there are wholly exceptional and valid reasons (such as physical incapacity due to a serious accident), supported by third party evidence, for the request not having been submitted by the deadline.

2.2 Rights and responsibilities of University staff

- 2.2.1 Student & Academic Services is responsible for issuing a receipt as evidence of submission of requests from all students for deferral of formal examinations.

Student & Academic Services is responsible for ensuring that all eligible cases are referred to the Academic Board Panel or its nominated representative (see paragraph 3.1.1 below).

- 2.2.2 The Faculty Office is responsible for issuing a receipt as evidence of submission of requests from all students for deferral of coursework and faculty based tests.

The Faculty Office is responsible for ensuring that all such cases are referred to the appropriate Faculty Panel (see paragraphs 3.1.2 and 3.1.3 below).

- 2.2.3 Panels considering requests for deferral have the right to reject late submissions and circumstances which do not relate in time to the assessment concerned.

- 2.2.4 Student & Academic Services is responsible for ensuring that the student is notified in writing of the outcome of their application for deferral of formal examinations.

The student's Faculty Office is responsible for ensuring that the student is notified in writing of the outcome of their application for deferral of coursework and faculty-based tests.

- 2.2.5 Panels considering requests for deferrals in formal examinations have the right to approve the deferral of all examinations (not merely those requested) if the evidence submitted crosses the whole exam period.

3 Procedure for consideration of requests

3.1 Constitution of Panels

- 3.1.1 The Academic Board Panel is chaired by the Head of Academic Services and comprises: the Head of the Academic Support Office, an Associate Dean Academic, a representative of Student & Academic Services and a representative of the Students' Union.

The Academic Board Panel, or its nominated representative, will consider requests from all students for deferral of formal examinations. In order to consider requests in a timely manner they will be assessed initially by the nominated representative who has the authority to accept straightforward requests. Other requests will be considered by the Panel.

- 3.1.2 Each Faculty has established its own Panel to consider requests from students on all programmes for deferral of coursework or faculty-based assessments (such as phase tests).

The Faculty Panels are chaired by the Faculty Associate Dean Academic (or nominee) and their membership comprises appropriate senior academic staff and the Faculty Manager (or nominee).

3.2 Panel Procedure

- 3.2.1 All Panels convene immediately preceding and immediately following the main examination period in the summer term. They also meet immediately following the examination period in August. Deadline dates by which requests and accompanying evidence must have been received by Student & Academic Services and faculty offices are published annually².

Requests received after the deadlines will be dismissed (see paragraph 2.1.5 above). Requests received after results have been published for the assessments for which deferral is sought will not be considered.

For any examinations (undergraduate and postgraduate) that fall outside the main examination periods, the deadline will be 14 calendar days from the date of the examination concerned.

² Deadline information is obtainable from Faculty Offices and Student & Academic Services

Where there is no timely Panel meeting, straightforward requests will be dealt with by the Panel's nominated representative, except that requests may only be rejected on the authority of the Panel Chair (or his/her nominee) in consultation with another Panel member.

3.2.2 Each Panel shall consider the evidence provided in support of the application for deferral of assessment (see paragraphs 2.1.3 and 2.1.4 above). If the Panel accepts that the evidence clearly demonstrates that, at a time closely relating to the assessment, the student's performance was seriously impaired by adverse personal circumstances, the Panel shall direct deferral to the next normal scheduled date of the assessment.

3.2.3 If the student has already completed the assessment(s) for which deferral is being requested, and the Panel accedes to the request, the student's examination script or other work submitted for assessment will not be marked. If it has already been marked, the mark or grade or other outcome shall be declared void and shall not be entered on the student's record either at this time or at any future time. Once a deferral request has been accepted by the Panel a student may not retract said request at a later date.

3.2.4 The decision of the Panel shall be final, except that a student has the right of appeal on the following grounds only:

- That there is new and relevant evidence which the student was demonstrably and for the most exceptional reason unable to provide in the first instance.
- That the Panel did not comply with its own procedures as set out above.

Any student wishing to appeal must do so in writing, stating clearly the specific grounds on which the appeal is based, to the Student Appeals and Conduct Officer within 10 working days of the Panel decision.

3.2.5 On receipt of such an appeal the Student Appeals & Conduct Officer will:

- In relation to coursework; convene the Academic Board Panel who will consider the case.
- In relation to an examination; consult with the Director of Student & Academic Services who will consider the case.

This decision shall be final and not subject to review by any other University Body.

3.2.6 The decision shall be immediately reported to the appropriate Assessment Board and notified to the student in writing.

4 Circumstances affecting deadlines for coursework

In respect of requests for extensions of coursework deadlines of no more than 14 days, on medical or other grounds, module leaders (or other designated members of staff) may exercise discretion to approve extensions or, where appropriate and practical, to make alternative arrangements for assessment, in accordance with published Faculty guidelines. Such requests for extensions must be agreed with the module leader in advance of the deadline date. If an extension has been granted, or alternative assessment arrangements approved, the module leader should place a written note on the student's file explaining the length of extension or nature of assessment approved.

In cases where an extension to a deadline for 14 days is not sufficient to meet the particular circumstances of the student, or where a student feels that, despite being granted an extension of up to 14 days, his/her performance in a piece of coursework has been seriously impaired by extenuating circumstances, the student may apply formally to the Faculty Panel for full deferral of assessment or coursework.

5 Attendance at examinations and other scheduled tests

Whenever a student is absent from an examination or other scheduled test it is in his/her own interests to inform the relevant tutor as soon as possible of any extenuating circumstances which prevented attendance, and to submit a request for deferral, if appropriate.

Where a request for deferral is not granted in the case of unauthorised absence from an examination or other test, a mark of 0 is awarded for that examination or test.

Students are individually responsible for making adequate arrangements to ensure that they are able to attend examinations or other scheduled tests, and must make due allowance for unusual circumstances which can reasonably be anticipated. A student who is prevented from attending an examination or other scheduled test by exceptional and unforeseeable weather conditions should immediately contact the Student Gateway for guidance on the relevant procedure.

6 Professional Body requirements

In cases where professional bodies so require, the consideration of requests by students for deferral of assessment will be undertaken by the relevant Assessment Board rather than by the Academic Board Panel. In such cases, local Faculty arrangements for notifying students of the relevant procedures will obtain.