

## Illness and other extenuating circumstances

### A code of practice and guidelines for students and course leaders

- 1 An assessment board may consider certain extenuating circumstances in mitigation of:
  - a) poor or inadequate performance (to gain further time and the opportunity for reassessment without penalty);
  - b) failure to attend for examinations/assessments;
  - c) failure to submit work by the appointed time in any form of examination or assessment which contribute to the final award or to a decision on the progress of a student through the course.
  
- 2 Extenuating circumstances are circumstances which:
  - a) are exceptional;
  - b) are outside the student's control;
  - c) can be corroborated by independent evidence;
  - d) occurred during or shortly before the assessment in question and may have led to an unrepresentative performance in relation to the student's previously demonstrated ability.

Examples include:

- a) illness or disability at the time of the examination or the date for the submission of work;
  - b) unusually severe mental or emotional stress at or immediately before the time of the examination or the date for submission of work;
  - c) poor health or unusually severe mental or emotional problems or other severe hardships during the course.
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- 3 Examples of the kind of circumstances which will **not** be deemed valid are:
    - a) a short term problem such as a cold or flu which has occurred during the course of a term will not be deemed to be valid since students are expected to plan their work schedule sufficiently well so that minor illnesses or problems do not affect their ability to meet submission deadlines, therefore this will not be deemed to have had a significant overall effect on performance (it is recognised, however, that a viral illness may have had an impact where it has occurred at the time of an assessment or the submission date for course work);
    - b) mild unspecified depression or a level of anxiety and stress which normally occurs at assessment time;
    - c) technical problems, such as a corrupted disk, lack of a printer, loss of work on a computer with no back up. Students are advised to keep copies, photographs and a record of work submitted for assessment;
    - d) full-time students may not make a claim of extenuating circumstances relating to pressure of work, since they have, by implication, made a commitment to make available the time necessary for study.
  
  - 4 It is the responsibility of the student to invoke this process where s/he believes she may have extenuating circumstances which have affected his/her performance in assessments before the submission date of the assessment. This should be done in writing, and must be accompanied by independent corroborating evidence, eg doctor's certificate. Students who choose not to reveal any medical or other problem will not normally be able to use this information as the grounds for any subsequent appeal; where information has not been made available, the review of a decision will only be undertaken under the most exceptional circumstances.

Corroborating evidence must be specific about:



- a) the nature, timing and severity of the problem;
- b) if possible, provide an independent assessment of the effect the problem may have had on the student's performance;
- c) Students must ensure the clarity and accuracy of the corroborating evidence.

Corroborating evidence may include:

- a) a medical note confirming a medical or psychological condition provided at the time when the student was suffering from that condition (students should not seek evidence retrospectively – any certificate or other medical note where the date is after the date(s) of the illness may not be accepted);
- b) a letter from a counsellor (either a member of the University College's Accommodation and Welfare or a qualified counsellor working outside of the University College) confirming a personal psychological or emotional problem for which the student has been receiving counselling;
- c) a note from the Accommodation Office confirming a particularly severe accommodation problem;
- d) an official document such as a police report including a police reference number, court summons or other legal document;
- e) a letter from a solicitor, social worker or other official agency;
- f) an insurance claim document supported by a letter from the insurance company;
- g) written evidence from academic staff who have been closely involved in the pastoral care of a student which corroborates the student's account. However, in order to avoid allegations of unfair treatment and to ensure consistency of practice such evidence must be countersigned by another member of staff, or student counsellor;
- h) independent verification of the evidence may be sought by the chair of the assessment board.

### **Process**

- 1 Students who wish extenuating circumstances to be considered should print an Extenuating Circumstances Form. This form should be completed, corroborating evidence attached, and all paperwork returned in one envelope to the Quality & Standards Team. It should be clearly marked for the attention of the Assistant Registrar responsible for the assessment process.
- 2 Extenuating circumstances claims should be submitted as soon as possible. Incomplete claims (ie those lacking either the form or the supporting evidence) will not normally be considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel. It is unlikely that late submissions for extenuating circumstances can be considered.
- 3 Students can be assured that all claims of extenuating circumstances are confidential to the Extenuating Circumstances Panel and will not be disclosed outside of that meeting (other than if they need to be considered for an extenuating circumstances appeal or an appeal against the decision of the Assessment Board). The assessment board considering the student in question will be notified only that a named student has valid extenuating circumstances.

### **Extenuating Circumstances Panels**

- 1 There will be two Extenuating Circumstances Panels: one for the School of Art & Design and one for the School of Media & Performance. The Panel will normally be chaired by the Associate Dean of the School (Learning, Teaching & Student Experience). However, in the absence of the Associate Dean (LT&SE), the Chair can be delegated to an appropriate alternative, such as the Dean or another Associate Dean in the School.
- 2 The other members of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel will be an Assistant Registrar from the Quality & Standards Team and one other member of staff nominated by the Chair of the Panel.

- 3 The Extenuating Circumstances Panels will meet prior to formal progression boards (mid-year) and assessment boards. Its purpose is to determine the validity of the request for extenuating circumstances according to the definitions in the policy.
- 4 A meeting of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel will not be invalidated by the unavoidable absence of any member (other than the Chair) providing those present agree that sufficient expertise is available to enable the Panel to make an informed decision.
- 5 If the Extenuating Circumstances Panel does not consider that it has sufficient corroborating evidence, a decision may be deferred and the student asked to submit additional evidence.

### **Appeals**

Any student wishing to appeal the decision of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel should follow the University College's appeals procedure.

**Note:** students who have not submitted a claim of extenuating circumstances under these regulations will not normally be able to use extenuating circumstances as the basis for a subsequent appeal against the decision of an assessment board.