

Policy on Mitigating Circumstances (updated June 2017)

Introduction and Scope

1. During the course of their studies, students may suffer from some illness or misfortune that adversely affects their ability to complete an assessment or the results they obtain for an assessment. This Policy sets out the University's arrangements for considering requests for mitigation in such circumstances.
2. This Policy applies to Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students. It will only apply to Postgraduate Research students when they are studying the taught elements of a doctoral programme of study. The policy which deals with mitigating circumstances affecting Postgraduate Research students is the [Policy on the Circumstances Leading to Changes to Postgraduate Research Study](#).

Policy

3. The University defines mitigating circumstances as 'unforeseeable or unpreventable circumstances that could have, or did have, a significant adverse effect on the academic performance of a student'.
4. Students are responsible for submitting their own requests for consideration of mitigating circumstances. As such, they must be made aware by Schools of the University's definition of mitigating circumstances and of the procedures for submitting a request for mitigation.
5. Schools must ensure that students have a realistic appreciation of the range of actions or remedies available to deal with the circumstances in relation to which they claim mitigation. To this end, information about the consideration of mitigating circumstances must be included in programme handbooks, and staff responsible for advising students need to be fully aware of what circumstances might warrant consideration under this Policy (see Grounds for Mitigation).
6. Schools must publicise the deadlines for submission of requests for mitigation and the procedure for submitting such requests in appropriate places, for example, in programme handbooks, on School intranets, by email or on notice boards.
7. Requests for mitigation submitted after the published date for the beginning of an assessment period (except those requests made as a result of circumstances that have arisen during the course of that assessment period) will not be considered without a credible and compelling explanation as to why the circumstances were not known before the beginning of the assessment period or why the student was unable to complete or submit an application prior to the published date.
8. A student cannot submit the same standalone, individual circumstance as a request for mitigation more than once, unless the student can show that the circumstance has exacerbated in some way, or the effects on the student have lasted longer than expected.
9. Procedures for handling mitigating circumstances need to be clear and easily understood by both staff and students. Requests for mitigation must be processed formally and judged impartially. Schools must develop processes that properly document each case. The procedures need to be applied consistently and in line with this Policy, but with enough flexibility to apply equally to undergraduate and taught postgraduate

students and to allow Schools to meet any discipline-specific or professional requirements. Arrangements must also be proportionate, so that, where necessary, requests for mitigation can be dealt with quickly with a minimum of bureaucracy, such as through sub-panels on the delegated authority of the Mitigating Circumstances Panel through their agreed terms of reference. The Mitigating Circumstances Procedures provide further guidance; this includes additional details regarding sub-panels.

10. Mitigating Circumstances Panels must meet prior to the Examination Board and should not consider the marks or profile of the individual students concerned. The purpose of the Panels is to determine whether there is substantiated evidence of circumstances eligible for mitigation and, if so, to determine if they might, or did, have an adverse effect on the student's performance and, if so, it will judge how significant that effect was or would have been. It is then the role of an Examination Board to consider the effects of this and apply the recommendations of the Mitigating Circumstances Panel.
11. Schools must inform students of the outcome and progress, as appropriate, of their request for mitigation, in a timely manner.

Grounds for mitigation

12. Possible mitigating circumstances include:
 - significant illness or injury; or worsening of an ongoing illness or disability, including mental health conditions; (please see the following DASS webpage for examples of disabilities: <http://www.dso.manchester.ac.uk/who-do-we-support/current-students/>);
 - the death or critical/significant illness of a close family member/dependant;
 - significant family or personal crises or major financial problems leading to acute stress; and
 - absence from the University for public service, for example, jury service.
13. Circumstances that will not normally be regarded as grounds for mitigation include:
 - holidays, moving house and events that were planned or could reasonably have been expected;
 - assessments that are scheduled close together;
 - misreading the timetable or misunderstanding the requirements for assessments;
 - inadequate planning and time management;
 - failure, loss or theft of a computer or printer that prevents submission of work on time; students should back up work regularly and not leave completion so late that they cannot find another computer or printer;
 - the act of religious observance;
 - consequences of paid employment (except in some special cases for part-time students);
 - exam stress or panic attacks not diagnosed as illness or supported by medical evidence; and
 - disruption in an examination room during the course of an assessment which has not been brought to the attention of, or recorded by, the invigilators (including instances such as fire alarms or other noise disruption).
14. Events may arise during pregnancy that may constitute mitigating circumstances, and these need to be judged on a case by case basis. It is recommended by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), that, at a minimum, students are required to take two weeks' compulsory maternity-related absence, or four weeks if they are on placement in a factory. This is in line with employment law, and is to ensure the health and safety of the mother following birth.

Sources of Support and advice

15. The following areas of the University can be contacted for support and advice relating to mitigating circumstances:

- i. The University Counselling Service - <http://www.counsellingservice.manchester.ac.uk/>
- ii. Student Support and Advice - <http://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/>
- iii. Disability Advisory and Support Service - <http://www.dso.manchester.ac.uk/>
- iv. Occupational Health Service - <http://www.occhealth.manchester.ac.uk/>
- v. Students' Union Advice Service - <http://manchesterstudentsunion.com/advice/service>
- vi. Students' own programme or School office – please see the following for a list of School contacts - <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/structure/faculties-schools/>

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