Guidance for staff on Mitigating Circumstances, Self-Certification of Absence and Automatic Extensions relating to Covid-19 (Coronavirus), 2020/21

Background

Arrangements were put in place in spring 2020 to manage the impact of the Covid-19 virus on the volume of students submitting claims for mitigating circumstances by temporarily removing the requirement to provide evidence for illness and introducing a step prior to mitigating circumstances submission which allows students to self-certify for illness for a period up to and including seven days.

The following guidance is in place in relation to the use of mitigating circumstances and self-certification for the 2020/21 academic year.

Self-certification of Absence from Learning

Self-certification has been expanded to cover not just student illness.

Student Self-Certification of Absence from Learning is for students who miss learning opportunities due to short-term illness but also situations such as loss of IT connection, care duties etc. can also be included.

Self-certification is part of the process of a student reporting to the University that they are struggling to engage with learning opportunities. This self-reporting of difficulty with study should fit with engagement monitoring data gathering (formerly called attendance monitoring or class registers but now could include data on VLE access and PC cluster login).

Self-certification process 2020/21

- Students should submit to their School a Student Self-certification of absence form if they are ill or are unable to engage with study for a period up to and including seven days, in relation to teaching and learning activities; the form relates to attendance and engagement and is not part of the mitigating circumstances procedure.
- Self-certification should therefore be used to help the Academic Advisor to spot early signs of a student starting to struggle with their study. The Academic Advisor should guide the student to engage in the relevant support systems to catch up and recover.

Mitigating circumstances

Mitigating circumstances are ‘unforeseeable or unpreventable circumstances that could have, or did have, a significant adverse effect on the academic performance of a student’.

Mitigating circumstances are part of the process for informing Examination Boards about adverse circumstances impacting students’ summative assessment.

Mitigating circumstances in most instances require independent verifiable evidence to support the claims made by the student. The Assessment Pledge introduced on 19th January removed the requirement to provide evidence to support applications relating to illness. (Further details for students about the Assessment Pledge can be found in the Assessment Pledge FAQs). Remedies for mitigating circumstances relate only to how summative assessment is dealt with by the Exam Board. They do not help remedy the cause of the unforeseen event.
Mitigating circumstances process 2020/21

- Students who are affected by illness or circumstances which they believe impact on their ability to study and could have an adverse effect on their assessments, are advised to submit a claim for mitigating circumstances;
- The Assessment Pledge introduced on 19th January 2021 removed the requirement for students to submit supporting evidence with any claim for illness for mitigating circumstances.
- Any student who receives a positive Covid-19 test must inform the University immediately following the guidance they have received advising them of the process depending on their individual circumstances ([https://www.welcome.manchester.ac.uk/welcome-and-induction/arriving-on-campus/staying-safe/](https://www.welcome.manchester.ac.uk/welcome-and-induction/arriving-on-campus/staying-safe/));
- If a student is required to self-isolate for a period of 14 days they will be expected to move to the remote study option* and this will not be accepted as a reason for mitigating circumstances;
- Guidance for staff members on the steps they should follow to report that a student has disclosed that they have tested positive for COVID-19 or have started to self-isolate is available at: [http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=50638](http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=50638);
- Students who are studying remotely will be responsible for ensuring that they have access to the appropriate IT equipment and reliable internet access for their particular programme of study and they would need to cover any costs associated with these; if students are studying remotely (through choice or through the need to self-isolate), they are advised to check with their programme team regarding any specific IT equipment/internet access that is required to enable them to fully engage with their programme of study;
- Students are reminded that if they are struggling to access appropriate equipment they can contact helpmegetonline@manchester.ac.uk who will be able to provide appropriate levels of support depending on individual circumstances;
- Normally, the Policy on Mitigating Circumstances does not allow IT failures as grounds for mitigation; however, due to the move to blended learning, certain IT-related circumstances will be accepted. If students are claiming mitigating circumstances due to IT failure or equipment or connectivity, evidence of this failure would be required to support any claim. Examples of evidence include copies of correspondence from an internet service provider or utility company, as appropriate; or if students experience a network or hardware fault at the point of submission, they should take a screenshot or photograph of any error message. Further guidance on IT issues being considered a grounds for mitigation, can be found at: [http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=51373](http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=51373).
- Academic colleagues and students should do what they can to avoid these issues arising in the first place, e.g. staff not setting deadlines or exams during known Blackboard downtime, no deadlines out of working hours or when IT support is not available and advising students to plan well so they are not submitting work at the last minute.
- If students are submitting requests for mitigating circumstances in relation to new caring responsibilities (if their child has to stay at home from school to self-isolate, for example), evidence should be provided such as Copies of emails/letters from your child’s school/childcare facility confirming that your child is unable to attend their usual facilities, including relevant dates

Automatic Extension (academic year 2020/21 only)

The Assessment Pledge introduced on 19th January 2021 allows students to choose to have an automatic extension of up to seven days, for up to two individual assignments or pieces of coursework from January 2021 until the end of the academic year. This will allow them to choose how best to resolve any challenges arising from deadlines “bunching up”.
Students have to advise their School or Programme Team in advance of the original deadline if they wish to do this by completing a form available online. The automatic extensions are available in addition to any extension that a student may be granted separately via mitigating circumstances or through DASS.

Further information can be found at the following locations:

**Self-certification**

https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/policy-guidance/assessment/reaching-decisions-from-assessment/self-certification/

**Mitigating Circumstances**

https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/policy-guidance/assessment/reaching-decisions-from-assessment/mitigating-circumstances/

**Guidance for students**

https://www.welcome.manchester.ac.uk/welcome-and-induction/arriving-on-campus/staying-safe/coronavirus-faqs/

https://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/study-support/mitigating-circumstances/

https://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/study-support/academic-support/accessing-online-teaching-and-learning/assessments-and-exams/help-with-assessment-issues/

https://manchesterstudentsunion.com/advice/academic-advice/mitigating-circumstances

* Students should check with their programme team to ensure this option is available.

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