

Guidelines to Students, Staff and Module Boards on Serious Adverse Circumstances

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1 **What are 'serious adverse circumstances'?**

'Serious adverse circumstances' are significant circumstances beyond a student's control that would affect the student's ability to perform to their full potential if they were to submit or attend assessments at the appointed time. The table on pages 5-9 sets out the guidance to be followed by Assessment Panels and Module Boards. The table provides examples of the types of circumstance that the University considers to be sufficiently serious, along with some examples of what would not be sufficient.

It is important to note that **extensions** for coursework submission operate on different principles and that extensions are more widely available. Students can find details of their School's arrangements for granting extensions in their Student /Programme Handbook.

2 **Principles**

- (i) The University allows students to draw to its attention any significant circumstances beyond the student's control that mean their performance would be prejudiced if they were to submit or sit an assessment at the appointed time. However, **if a student, despite such circumstances, decides to sit/submit an assessment, the University will not accept a claim that the student has serious adverse circumstances with regard to that assessment.** This principle is in line with the University's aim to make students fit for the world of employment; one such skill involves taking responsibility for one's own decision making. This principle operates subject to two **highly exceptional** circumstances set out in paragraph 7 below.
- (ii) Programme staff will advise students on what an Assessment Panel/Module Board is likely to regard as a serious adverse circumstance, but the decision whether to sit/submit or not to sit/submit will lie with the student alone.

- (iii) Where a claim of serious adverse circumstances is submitted by a student, the following principles will be adhered to by the Assessment Panels and Module Boards:
- (a) Where a student has proven serious adverse circumstances, the University does not award grades based on what the student may have achieved had the circumstances not existed/occurred. Instead, the University gives the student more time or repeated opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities; and
 - (b) The University will treat information about a student's serious adverse circumstances with sensitivity and respect, regardless of the level of perceived severity; and
 - (c) The University will treat a student's reported circumstances with as much confidentiality as is practically possible. In very sensitive circumstances, a student may request that the circumstances are only disclosed to the Chair of the Assessment Panel, the Chair of the Module Board and the external examiners (**UPR AS 14 C3.8.7**).

3. Process for submission of serious adverse circumstances

- (i) If there is a serious adverse circumstance that has affected an assessment (or assessments), the student must communicate details to the University using the form provided by the School, with appropriate evidence.
- (ii) All Schools have a system for the submission of forms and evidence (normally through the School administrative office) and for recording the receipt of such forms and evidence. Forms must be submitted prior to any meeting of the Module Board as described in the University's Policies and Regulations (**UPR AS14 paragraph C3.8; AS12 Appendix 1 paragraph 5.4.2**).
- (iii) Where a medical certificate is provided as evidence of a serious adverse circumstance, the certificate must be dated within seven working days of the relevant assessment.
- (iv) A small number of GP practices have a policy of not issuing medical certificates (self-certification for the first seven days of illness). If your GP practice operates such a policy, you must provide the University with evidence from the practice (e.g. the website) that such a policy is in operation.

4. Serious adverse circumstances and attendance at lectures/seminars, etc

If students are required to attend a lecture, seminar, practical or other type of timetabled class and they are unable to do so due to illness, they must self-certify to this effect. If, however, the illness extends beyond seven successive working days and attendance is required, students should obtain a medical certificate verifying that they are not fit to attend.

5. Serious adverse circumstances and non-attendance at an examination/in-class test

If a student is not sufficiently fit to attend an examination/in-class test they should notify

the appropriate staff in their School before the scheduled start time, and their doctor or other registered medical professional/counsellor (where appropriate) as soon as possible. **It is important to note that the University Medical Practice is not prepared to give retrospective certification after the date of the examination / in-class test. Certification can only be provided if a doctor or nurse has been consulted by a student during their illness.**

6. Serious adverse circumstances and failure to submit coursework by the due date

If a student is unable to submit coursework by the due date, in the first instance they should apply to the designated member of staff of the programme for an extension (if available). Once the period for extensions has expired, students must complete a serious adverse circumstances form following the procedure set out in paragraph 3 above.

7. Serious adverse circumstances and attendance at an examination / in-class test or the submission of coursework

Except in the two circumstances outlined below, students who sit/submit an assessment deem themselves to be sufficiently able to undertake the assessment and cannot later claim to have suffered 'serious adverse circumstances' to explain poor performance.

Exceptions:

- i Where at the time of sitting/submitting the relevant assessment, it is established that the student was not capable of understanding that their performance was likely to be affected seriously by ill health and/or its treatment and this view is supported by a doctor/psychiatric practitioner or the University's Disability Services.

This ground will be a very rare occurrence as in most circumstances students will be able to decide whether their serious adverse circumstances are likely to affect their performance in assessments. Examples may include the death of a close family member within a day or so of the examination/in-class test; being involved in a serious car accident on the way to an examination and suffering post-traumatic stress; or being unaware of the likely effect of a serious mental illness on assessment performance.

The student will be required to lodge a claim of serious adverse circumstances using the normal procedures (see paragraph 3 above). In addition, they will be required to take **a special letter** to their doctor/psychiatric practitioner or the University's Disability Services in which the health professional is asked to certify to the effect that at the time the student took the assessment they were *not capable of understanding* that their performance was likely to be affected seriously by ill health and/or its treatment.

If the claim is upheld, **the original mark will be null and void**. If the claim is not upheld, the recorded mark will stand.

- ii Where a student suddenly becomes unwell during an examination or in-class test

and they decide to leave without completing the assessment. In this event, they **must** notify the invigilator before leaving the examination room of the serious adverse circumstances which necessitate their leaving, unless it is impractical to do so (e.g., the student is unconscious or being violently sick).

If, having left the examination room, the student decides to rely on serious adverse circumstances and they submit a form requesting a deferral and their circumstances are approved, **the original mark will be null and void**. If the claim is not upheld, the recorded mark will stand.

8. Serious adverse circumstances and students with a disability

- i Whilst it is acceptable for Schools to accept evidence of a medical disability from a doctor, it is not appropriate for Schools to accept a diagnosis of a specific learning difficulty without consulting Disability Services.
- ii Where a School Assessment Panel (SAP) considers that a serious adverse circumstance is linked to a disability and the School has received no information from Disability Services, the SAP should obtain the consent of the student in question to refer the evidence to Disability Services.
- iii Before accepting cases of serious adverse circumstances on the grounds of disability, Boards of Examiners should check with Disability Services whether the evidence of disability provided by the student to the Board is satisfactory. This includes cases where the student has alleged that they have not received appropriate support from Disability Services.
- iv Students submitting serious adverse circumstances for a reason related to disability support should ask a member of Disability Services for a written statement to support their claim.
- v Disability Services may submit evidence on behalf of a student under exception (i) in paragraph 7 above, where appropriate.

Table of serious adverse circumstances and actions

| | Main types of serious adverse circumstance (SAC) reported | Evidence required | Action |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | <p>Medical (serious – not a recognised disability). Examples: broken limb, problem with eyesight, influenza, vomiting or migraine <u>at time of assessment</u>, infectious condition.</p> <p>Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influenza ('flu') does not refer to the common cold or conditions with similar symptoms. • Some conditions <u>may</u> be able to be accommodated by separate arrangements (e.g., the use of an amanuensis for those with broken arms) if they are reported before the cut-off date for adjustments published on StudyNet. | <p>Medical certificate or there is evidence from the invigilator's log. Only medical certificates dated within 7 working days of the assessment will be accepted.</p> | <p>Deferral.</p> <p>Notes: If, however, the student has acceptable serious adverse circumstances which prevent him/her from sitting the deferral until the same time in the following academic session, the Programme Board has discretion to offer Final Compensatory Credit with or without penalty (for a total of thirty credits) subject to the limitations set out in UPR AS14 D.4.1.</p> |
| 2 | <p>Medical (minor) e.g. a cold or ongoing chronic condition such as asthma and IBS (unless, in the case of an examination/in-class test, the symptoms are so bad on the relevant day that the student is too unwell to attend, in which case the condition will be treated as serious as in 1 above):</p> | <p>Not applicable</p> | <p>Not an acceptable SAC unless, in the case of an examination/in-class test, the symptoms are so bad on the relevant day that the student is too unwell to attend. A medical certificate is then required.</p> |

| Main types of serious adverse circumstance (SAC) reported | Evidence required | Action |
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| <p>3 Disability and Mental health <i>If you were unable to sit/submit an assessment for reasons related to your disability your SAC will be considered with appropriate evidence. A diagnosis of a disability / mental health condition alone is not valid grounds for a SAC.</i></p> <p>3(a) An agreed adjustment as described in an SNA was not implemented.</p> <p>3(b) A late request (after the published deadline) for a disability related adjustment – you can choose to take the assessment OR not take the assessment and submit a SAC.</p> <p>3(c) You were unable to take the assessment for reasons directly related to your disability / mental health.</p> <p>3(d) You sat the assessment but your mental state at the time of sitting meant that you did not realise you were unfit to do so, for example, due to a psychosis or post traumatic response to a recent incident.</p> | <p>3(a) Confirmation in writing that the agreed adjustment was not implemented.</p> <p>3(b) If submitting a SAC, confirmation in writing from Student Wellbeing that the circumstances are valid.</p> <p>3(c) Confirmation in writing from Student Wellbeing that the SAC is valid or letter from a medical practitioner to confirm you were unable to sit / submit.</p> <p>3(d) Completed and signed “SAC Medical Practitioner form” (Form MP2) is the only acceptable evidence.</p> | <p>3(a) Deferral</p> <p>3(b), 3(c) and 3(d) As circumstance 1; the Module Board will consider the seriousness of the condition and the extent of the student’s control</p> |

| | Main types of serious adverse circumstance (SAC) reported | Evidence required | Action |
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| 4 | Death and Bereavement 4(a) Death of an immediate relative or of a close Friend. 4(b) Attendance at a funeral at the time of the assessment. 4(c) Death of a relative or friend outside the semester or attendance at a funeral at a different time from the assessment. | 4(a) or 4(b) Death certificate or letter from a religious leader or doctor, additional information (location of funeral). Not applicable | The Module Board will consider the timing and impact of the death in relation to the assessment, the closeness of the student to the relative /friend and the responsibilities of the student. The Module Board will also have regard to cultural differences around periods of mourning and the arrangements for funeral ceremonies. Not an acceptable SAC |
| 5 | Serious illness in family (particularly where the student has duty of care). | Medical certificate (for student or the family member) evidence of carer responsibilities from a professional. Only medical certificates dated within 7 working days of the assessment will be accepted. | Deferral (in appropriate circumstances). The Module Board will consider the timing of the illness, the closeness of the relationship, the impact on the student and the responsibilities of the student. |
| 6a | Commitment outside of the student's control (e.g. emergencies, including unexpected loss of childcare or other carer support) on the day of an assessment. | 6(a) As appropriate (e.g. letter from employer or nursery, letter in support of a carer). | Deferral (in appropriate circumstances). The Module Board will consider the seriousness of the event and the extent of the student's control. |

| | Main types of serious adverse circumstance (SAC) reported | Evidence required | Action |
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| 6b | Work commitments (for students registered as being a part-time student or studying on a degree apprenticeship programme only) | 6(b)A letter from employer | Deferral. |
| 7 | <p>Transport Problems</p> <p>7(a) Serious transport problem (i.e. exceptional circumstance such as a serious rail delay or road traffic accident, snow causing serious delays to traffic).</p> <p>7(b) Transport problem – routine; (e.g. predictable or partly predictable transport problem (e.g. traffic jams, late train or bus etc), planned strike).</p> | <p>7(a)As appropriate (e.g. copy of ticket, compensation slip from rail company, traffic report).</p> <p>Not applicable</p> | <p>Deferral (in appropriate circumstances). The Module Board will consider the severity of the transport incident and the extent of the student's control report).</p> <p>Not an acceptable SAC.</p> |
| 8 | Misunderstood examination timetable. | Not applicable. | Not an acceptable SAC. |
| 9 | Overslept. | Not applicable. | Not an acceptable SAC. |

| | Main types of serious adverse circumstance (SAC) reported | Evidence required | Action |
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| 10 | Financial reasons | Not applicable. | Not an acceptable SAC. |
| 11 | Religious reasons, where not working is a requirement | Requests must be notified to the University at least two weeks in advance, with appropriate evidence, or by the deadline published by the Examinations Office in the case of examinations. | The University will make reasonable attempts to make adjustments to the assessment timetable. Deferral is an option where work is prescribed on a particular day for a particular faith group. If there is doubt as to whether work is prescribed, then the University will be guided by the advice of the University Chaplain who will consult with appropriate sources. In all cases the University's decision is final. Boards of Examiners should consult the University Chaplaincy for guidance on acceptable religious circumstances (chaplain@herts.ac.uk). A calendar of recognised prescribed days is issued annually. |
| 12 | Serious personal problem not medical (e.g. separation from spouse/partner, victim of crime) within the semester. | As appropriate (letter from counsellor, doctor, landlord, crime reference number, etc). | Deferral. |
| 13 | Computer problems 13(a) Failure of own computer or software – leading to loss of time to complete coursework or loss of files/data/work. 13 (b) Failure of UH/partner supplied equipment, infrastructure or software. | 13(a) Receipt from repairer, or evidence of legitimate warranty claim, screen shot etc. 13(b) Written evidence from technical team detailing the nature of the failure and duration. | Deferral possible, but the Module Board will decide on the basis of the timing, duration and impact on completion of the assessment Deferral possible, but the Module Board will decide on the basis of the timing, duration and impact on completion of the assessment. |

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| 13 | 13(c) Failure of 3rd party equipment, infrastructure (could be ISP or power failure, or failure of 3rd party online assessment system/invigilation) or other software. | 13(c) Written evidence from provider, screen shots, support from UH technical teams etc. | Deferral possible, but the Module Board will decide on the basis of the timing, duration and impact on completion of the assessment. |
| 14 | Re-instatement following barring of access to StudyNet (but only prior to withdrawal of the student for debt by the University) | Quercus record | The Module Board will consider the closeness of the barring of access to StudyNet to the assessment point and the impact of the period of barring on the student's studies. NB. If a student has been withdrawn by the University barring from StudyNet is not an acceptable SAC. |
| 15 | Holidays. | Booking information. | Deferral. Only acceptable if the booking is made prior to acceptance of the University of Hertfordshire offer. |
| 16 | Complaints about University of Hertfordshire staff which impact upon assessments (e.g. supervision). | Various (diary of missed meetings or classes, etc). | Note A complaint is not a serious adverse circumstance as such. It is dealt with under the University's complaints procedure as an informal or formal complaint to the School and ultimately actioned by the Module Board if the complaint is upheld. |