

# GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS ON MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES IN RELATION TO EXAMINATIONS AND OTHER FORMS OF ASSESSMENT

## Introduction

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning experience in higher education. Occasionally, for good reason, you may be prevented from undertaking or completing an assessment at the appropriate time. To ensure consistent and fair practice across the University and to improve understanding, the University has prepared the following guidance on what Schools, their Boards of Examiners and the Student Progress and Assessment Boards understand by acceptable “mitigating circumstances”. Your attention is also drawn to the Health Centres’ web pages, at: <http://www.unishealth.nhs.uk/SHCMedcerts.htm>.

## Principles

Consideration by Boards of Examiners of claims for mitigating or extenuating circumstances are founded on the following principles:

- that students are ordinarily expected to meet all deadlines for coursework and to attend all examinations, as prescribed in the Programme Regulations, and to make a ‘reasonable attempt’ to answer examination questions, coursework assignments or other modes of assessment;
- that it is the students’ responsibility to notify the Head of School, in writing and in advance (where possible), of any mitigating circumstances they would like the Board of Examiners to take into consideration;
- that information provided by students in support of such claims shall be regarded as confidential;
- that penalties may be incurred by late- or non-submission of coursework by the due deadline or by failure to attend and attempt a prescribed examination.

## Mitigating Circumstances

Not all ‘circumstances’ warrant the same consideration. Some are clearly beyond the reasonable control of students and some are not. The examples given below are not exhaustive but will serve as a guide to what Boards of Examiners will regard as acceptable ‘mitigating circumstances’ when making academic judgements:

### ***Examples of circumstances beyond the reasonable control of the student:***

- bereavement involving a close relative or friend
- serious accident or illness requiring hospitalisation
- serious infectious disease
- burglary and theft (*to be accompanied by a crime report*)
- childbirth.

### ***Examples of situations which may be considered beyond the reasonable control of the student:***

- medical operation (*if approved prior to the point of assessment or an emergency*)
- hospital tests (*if approved prior to the point of assessment*)
- being taken ill during an examination
- significant accident, injury, acute ailment or condition
- attending a wedding (of sibling, relative, friend) (*for examination only*);
- private or public transport failure leading to delays of more than 1 hour (*corroborative evidence is required to verify such a delay*)
- bankruptcy.

***Examples of circumstances that would NOT ordinarily be considered mitigating circumstances:***

- accidents to friend or relatives (*unless within 3 days prior to deadline or examination or where student is sole carer*)
- family illness (*except in an emergency or where the student is the sole carer*)
- examination nerves
- feeling generally anxious, depressed or stressed (*unless medically certificated and notified in advance i.e. at least 2 weeks*)
- clash with paid employment
- minor accidents or injuries
- pregnancy
- cold, cough, upper respiratory tract infection, throat infection, unspecified viral infection
- childcare problems that could have been anticipated
- domestic problems (*unless supported by independent evidence*)
- mistaking the deadline, or time management problems (including alarm not going off)
- private or public transport failure leading to delays of less than 1 hour
- general financial problems
- legal problems (*unless required to attend Court on the day of an examination or assessment*)
- holidays or booked travel arrangements
- house moves
- notes burned or stolen (*unless supported by a fire or police report*)
- intermittent or last minute computing equipment problems (discs, machines, printers, viruses)
- handing-in problems
- inclement weather (*unless exceptional/ severe conditions*)
- ignorance of the Regulations or examination/assessment arrangement.

**Reasonable Attempt**

Students will be judged to have made a ‘reasonable attempt’ at coursework or written examination, when, in the view of the examiners, the task has been approached seriously and failure is principally the consequence of genuine academic and intellectual weakness, rather than token effort and insincere commitment. Token submission of coursework or attendance at examination, intended to ‘buy time’ to make up for poor time management will not be accepted.

**Examples of ‘reasonable attempt’ in coursework**

- shows some evidence of appropriate preparation, especially reading
- is at, or close to, the stipulated length
- is supported by satisfactory attendance record
- broadly follows required formal guidelines with satisfactory presentation

**Examples of ‘reasonable attempt’ in examination**

- is of sufficient length to indicate that the student has been writing for most of the examination period
- shows that effort has been put into the answer while unintentionally missing the point of the question
- shows evidence of appropriate preparation, especially reading
- is supported by satisfactory attendance record.

If you feel your circumstances warrant consideration by the Board of Examiners you should notify the Head of School, in writing, in advance, at the earliest opportunity (within 7 days of the assessment deadline or examination). Your letter should state whether the circumstances relate to non-attendance at an examination or late submission

of an assignment. You should include supporting evidence (e.g. a medical certificate giving the nature and duration of any illness). You may inform your personal tutor, in confidence, of any problem you may not wish to disclose in writing. You should complete any late or non-submission forms your programme or School/Department requires. If you discover subsequently that there are circumstances you could not report in advance, you should inform the Head of School, in writing, as soon as possible.

**Examples of acceptable documentary evidence**

- letter from parent, or copy of death certificate, confirming bereavement
- letter from lawyer, hospital, GP or University Health Centre\*

**Examples of non-acceptable documentary evidence**

- self-certification of illness\*
- letter written by a friend or acquaintance.

*\* Please note that the University Health Centre will not “ratify” or “certify” illnesses which are reported retrospectively. Students who believe that their performance in an assessment, or ability to attend, might be affected by illness **must** contact the Health Centre **during the period of illness** in order that an appropriate supporting document can be provided for the Head of School [General Regulations 5.10-5.11 (undergraduate) and 4.15-4.16 (postgraduate) refer].*