



Code: QA209 Extenuating Circumstances Policy  
Title: Extenuating Circumstances  
Date: Dec 2020  
Approval: AC/20/A5/IV.7

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define and scope 'Extenuating Circumstances', provide guidance and a template for students to make a submission under the policy, and provide guidance to Colleges for consideration of submissions.

## 2. What are Extenuating Circumstances?

Extenuating circumstances are serious unavoidable, unpredictable and exceptional circumstances outside the control of the student, which may negatively impact the student's performance in assessment. These circumstances could, for example, prevent the student from attending an examination, submitting an assessment or component thereof, and/or performing below their own normative ability in an assessment. This policy applies to extenuating circumstances in all assessments for which academic credit carries at least 20% of overall module marks, including for example, continuous assessments, examinations, and individual- or group assignments, and assessed laboratory or clinical activity. For circumstances impacting assessments carrying less than 20% of overall marks, the student should contact the relevant lecturer. The policy includes circumstances that may arise under alternative assessment arrangements pertaining to systemic or sector-wide events such as covid-19.

## 3. Categories for inclusion

Extenuating circumstances must be pertinent to the time of an assessment, and comprise:

1. Involvement in an accident or serious incident
2. An acute illness, injury or trauma
3. Deterioration in an ongoing medical or health condition, or adverse change in a fluctuating condition
4. Life-threatening illness or death of a person with whom you have a close relationship
5. Significant adverse personal or family circumstances
6. Serious or abrupt upheaval, such as a house fire, burglary, or eviction; or upheaval with respect to geopolitical change related to period(s) of study abroad or international study trip(s)
7. A victim of crime or threatening behaviour
8. Other significant and relevant exceptional factors for which there is evidence that academic performance has been impaired

Examples of what may not normally be considered grounds for extenuating circumstances include:

- Events that apply to the entire student body pertaining to systemic or sector-wide events, for example, a pandemic
- Instances where an appropriate adjustment has already been made
- Unawareness of, or failure to adhere to the student code of conduct, including reduced engagement with academic activities such as attending lectures and/or tutorials/labs
- Misreading an examination timetable or schedule of deadlines for continuous assessment
- Having an examination timetable with more than one examination on the same or consecutive days
- Failure to plan an appropriate study schedule
- Lack of clarity amongst group members with respect to individuals' input into group assignments
- Workload relating to multiple assessments in a short time
- Alleged medical or health circumstances without adequate professional contemporaneous evidence
- Medical or health conditions that are not supported by evidence at the time of the condition, or circumstances that do not apply to the time pertaining to the assessment
- Retrospective reporting of illness and/or retrospective medical note
- Ongoing medical or health issues, or learning restrictions or disabilities, for which the student is already receiving appropriate care and/or adjustments, or are more appropriately declared to the University Student Support/Disability Support Service
- Normal stress associated with examination(s)/assessment(s)
- Minor illnesses such as a common cold, sore throats and coughs
- Accommodation, commuting or financial difficulties
- Elective holidays during the academic year and/or examination dates
- Paid or voluntary work
- IT and/or personal computer failure, or student failure to backup academic documents or protect against computer viruses
- English is not the student's first language
- Sporting commitments other than a) scheduled competitions as part of a University sports team, and/or b) an international team in a sport recognised by Sport Ireland
- Attendance at social events or campaigns
- Late or incomplete disclosure of circumstances

Each student's College of study will assess submissions. The University does not permit the same matter to be the subject of an extenuating circumstance submission and other University procedure(s) at the same time.

#### 4. How to make a submission

As a student you or, if incapacitated, your nominee should seek guidance in the first instance, from sources such as your College/School Office, Students' Union, Student Advisor, Disability

Support Services, or relevant academic staff. Potential conditions such as Dyspraxia, Dyslexia or ADHD should be brought to the attention of the relevant University's Support Services.

The extenuating circumstance must fall under the categories for inclusion listed above, and must also fulfil all of the criteria below. If the circumstance does not fulfil all of the criteria below, it may be more appropriately considered under the University's Policy on Deferral of Examinations, the University's Policy on Fitness to Study, Examinations Appeals, or other relevant policy. Your College/School Office will guide you.

Subsequently you or, if incapacitated, your nominee may make a submission(s) with respect to extenuating circumstances to the College Office, by completing the submission form at the end of this document (Appendix A). However you must personally sign the submission form (through a physical signature, electronic scan of same, or by typing your full name as an explicit electronic declaration to the effect of signing), or it will be invalid. The College Office may refer submissions to the Chair of the committee where there is an initial determination that a submission may be an extenuating circumstance, or transferred to the relevant College Office where the submission relates to a module(s) provided by another College. Each submission will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

*4.1 An extenuating circumstance must satisfy all of the following criteria:*

- The circumstance is unavoidable
- The circumstance is unpredictable
- The circumstance is exceptional
- The committee is made aware of the circumstance in sufficient and reasonable time to adequately consider it for the current examination period

*4.2 Your submission must explain:*

- what the circumstance(s) are
- which assessment(s) were affected
- how it affected you in relation to your studies or an assessment
- precisely when the circumstance(s) occurred

Your submission should include supporting documentation in line with section 4.4 below.

*4.3 You should conform to the following timeline requirements:*

- A submission may relate to an academic assessment before it is due for submission, or after a deadline has passed. For the former, a submission should be made as early as possible before the submission date. For the latter, a submission should be made as early as possible after the due date for the assessment.
- In relation to an ongoing extenuating circumstance you (or nominee) must formally notify the relevant College office at the earliest opportunity, normally no later than 7 days before the submission date of your first scheduled assessment for that module.

- In relation to scheduled formal examination sittings at the end of each semester, for an extenuating circumstance that has only presented at or near an examination in situations where you could not provide advance notice, you (or nominee) must normally notify the relevant College office by email within 7 days of the date of your last formal examination for that sitting. After 7 days, notification of an extenuating circumstance will only be accepted where you (or nominee) provide supporting professional evidence that you could not, or were not in a position to, have notified the College office earlier. If you don't have formal written examinations as part of your course of study, then this submission timeline applies at the module level, to be submitted no later than 7 days after the last submission date for a final assessment where a module is assessed wholly by continuous assessment.
- In some instances the relevant College committee may have insufficient time to adequately consider the submission, and the circumstance will be subject to the determination of the Examinations Board. An Examinations Board meets at the end of a semester or year to finalise student marks.
- After a relevant Examinations Board meeting has occurred, you can only raise an extenuating circumstance through the University's Examination Appeal process, under ground 'B', submitted to the Examinations Appeal Committee.

*4.4 You should be aware of the following requirements for supporting evidence:*

Independent documentary evidence will be necessary in most submissions, which is pertinent to the timeline of events which you say have affected your performance. Each component of evidence should be in English or Irish, and its source or author clearly stated. If evidence is submitted which relates to another living person, such as a family member, you are responsible for ensuring that the person concerned is aware that you are submitting information to the University and that they are aware of the way in which the information will be considered and kept in the University under the Extenuating Circumstances Policy and in compliance with GDPR.

Only supporting evidence from the following qualified professionals, who must not be a close family relative, will be considered:

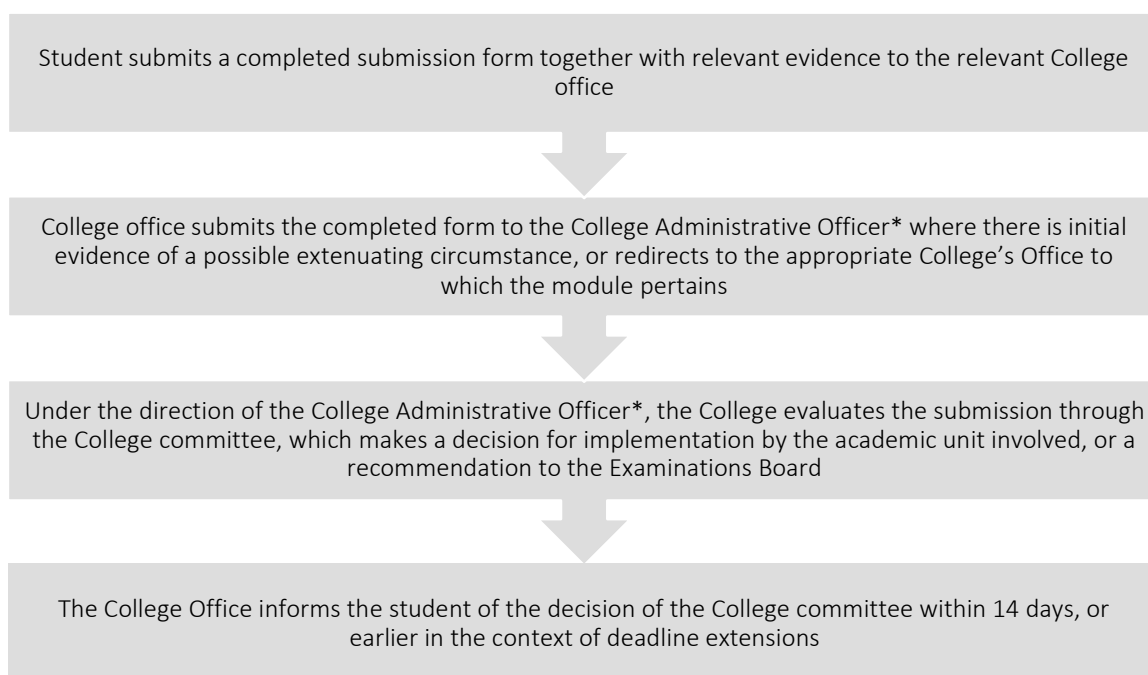
- A registered independent medical practitioner, health professional, counsellor, psychologist or psychotherapist
- An independent member of the Irish Police (An Garda Síochána)
- A University of Galway student support professional (e.g. official student advisor; staff member of the University's Student Support/Disability Support Service; official University student counsellor or chaplain; or for sports-related matters the University of Galway Sports High Performance lead)

Supporting evidence must be on relevant headed paper and must be authentic, legible and dated. Further, supporting evidence must not be provided or prepared by your familial relative, and must detail a) the relevant dates affected, and b) how your performance has been affected.

## 5. Process within Colleges

Short-term extensions (seven days or less) may be processed locally at School or Discipline level and must be recorded at College level.

The student should contact the relevant extenuating circumstances officer (ECO), who will be the programme director, the year co-ordinator or the discipline or school administrator (i.e. the contact person for extensions as identified in the student handbook for your programme). For all other applications the following process applies.



\* or Dean's nominee

Each College shall have an appropriate standing committee constituted for the implementation of this policy, to consider submissions, and to ensure consistency of treatment across that College. The committee will normally comprise the College Administrative Officer and 4 senior academic members of the College.

The committee will meet as required, with a minimum quorum of three, with relevant academic staff represented. At the discretion of the committee, other members of the College may be invited to contribute. The College Administrative Officer (or nominee) will arrange and chair its meetings, will arrange for the written note-taking of meetings and decisions in compliance with GDPR and using the template provided at the end of this document (Appendices C, D), and oversee implementation of decisions through the relevant academic structures of the College.

The committee will finalise its decisions no later than 14 days after the last day of formal Examinations in that semester. The College Administrative Officer (or nominee) will ensure that the College Office conveys the decision of the committee to the student within 14 days of receipt of the submission, or earlier as relevant in the context of deadline extensions.

The College Administrative Officer (or nominee) will report decisions to the College Executive, and ensure reporting of decisions to the relevant Examination Board. The Dean of College will report annually on decisions to Standing Committee of Academic Council (or equivalent).

## 6. Decision & Action

A decision of the committee will not directly alter existing preliminary marks awarded for a submitted assessment such as an assignment, practical or examination. The decision of the committee is subject to the University's Examinations Appeals process.

A decision may be a) an accommodation, b) a recommendation, or c) non-granting. Normally, the committee will make a decision by majority consensus. If majority consensus cannot be reached, the committee Chair will make a determination.

### (a) An accommodation

For a decision of a particular accommodation, implementation will be carried out through the relevant academic discipline at the direction of the College Administrative Officer (or nominee). The committee will ensure that a decision with respect to alternative provision or description of accommodation aligns with the learning outcome(s) for the initial assessment.

Accommodations are subject to professional or other accreditation requirements where relevant, and comprise:

- deadline extension\*
- an alternative or rescheduled assessment
- an exemption and/or realignment of weighting to other assessments within a module occurrence
- carry-over of existing marks
- deferral\*\*
- other provision as appropriate for the case

\* An extension will not be permissible if the extenuating circumstance submission is not received at least 7 days in advance of the initial advertised submission date for an assessment.

\*\* A deferral is only permissible in line with the University Deferral Policy.

Where the committee is unable to determine an appropriate and reasonable accommodation, the committee may decide to make a recommendation, as follows.

### (b) A recommendation

The committee may decide to make a recommendation for accommodation to the relevant Examinations Board in line with existing College policy. Determination of implementation of the recommendation of the committee rests with the Examinations Board, and will occur in line with the schedule of meetings for the relevant Examinations Board. The Examination Board will have regard to this policy and any recommendation(s).

A recommendation will include an indication of severity of impact of the circumstance, assessed by the committee as mild, moderate, serious or severe (Appendix B).

(c) Non-granting

The committee may decide not to grant the application.

## **Extenuating Circumstance Submission Form**

College of Arts, Social Science and Celtic Studies: Please complete [this form](#)

College of Business, Public Policy & law: Please complete [this form](#)

College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences: Please complete [this form](#)

College of Science & Engineering: Please complete [this form](#)

## Appendix A: Classifying Severity of Impact

Where the committee decides to make a recommendation to the Examinations Board, the recommendation(s) will include a classification of severity of impact of the circumstance, using four bands of classification: mild, moderate, serious and severe.

### Mild

A circumstance that is considered as having had a minimal impact on the assessment process.

An extenuating circumstance in this category normally relates to physical health and circumstantial occurrences.

This classification would normally apply if the circumstance did not have a substantive impact on performance in the assessment, or did not significantly impact the student's learning. A recommendation in this category would normally result in no or minimal mitigation by the Examinations Board.

### Moderate

A circumstance that is considered as having had a moderate impact on the assessment process.

An extenuating circumstance in this category may include acute medical episodes, a flare in an ongoing medical condition or mental health, or an occurrence such as involvement in an accident that may not cause injury but prevent a student from attendance or engagement in a time period pertinent to an assessment.

A recommendation in this category acknowledges that the student's performance in assessment was moderately affected by the circumstance, and that appropriate action should be taken in mitigation by the Examinations Board.

### Serious

A circumstances that is considered as having had a serious impact on the assessment process.

An extenuating circumstance in this category may include a medical condition that prevents the student from reasonably undertaking an assessment (e.g. a broken hand, unforeseen vision or hearing impairment), an acute medical issue or complex health matters, or unforeseen serious distress.

A recommendation in this category acknowledges that the student's performance in assessment was seriously affected by the circumstance, and that appropriate action should be taken in mitigation by the Examinations Board.

### Severe

A circumstance that is considered as having a severe impact on the assessment process.

An extenuating circumstance in this category may include extreme trauma involving hospitalisation, an unforeseen escalating severe medical issue across a relevant time period, emerging extreme mental health difficulty, or severe personal loss such as death of a family member.



A recommendation in this category acknowledges that the student's performance in assessment was severely affected by the circumstance, and that appropriate action should be taken in mitigation by the Examinations Board.

## Appendix B: College Log for Extenuating Circumstance Submissions

| Student ID | Programme of Study | Year of Study | Module(s) | Date of Decision | Decision* |
|------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
|            |                    |               |           |                  |           |
|            |                    |               |           |                  |           |
|            |                    |               |           |                  |           |
|            |                    |               |           |                  |           |

*\* Where a decision of the committee is a recommendation to the Examinations Board, an indication of the assessed level of severity of impact must be included (mild, moderate, serious, severe).*

## Appendix D: Note-taking template for Extenuating Circumstance Committee meetings

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Committee members attending: |  |
| Date of Meeting:             |  |

| Student ID | Programme of Study | Year of Study | Module(s) | Date of Decision | Decision* | Context |
|------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|---------|
|            |                    |               |           |                  |           |         |
|            |                    |               |           |                  |           |         |
|            |                    |               |           |                  |           |         |
|            |                    |               |           |                  |           |         |

*\* Where a decision of the committee is a recommendation to the Examinations Board, an indication of the assessed level of severity of impact must be included (mild, moderate, serious, severe).*