

# Open College of the Arts (OCA) Extenuating Circumstances Policy

**Including Extensions, Deferrals, Interruptions and Postponements of assessment**

**From August 2023**

Version no	Status	Policy Owner	Approved by	Date of approval	Date of next review
1	Approved	Lia Harness	OMG	13 January 2020	
2	Approved	Lia Harness	OMG	9 August 2021	
3	Approved	Lia Harness	OMG	7 June 2022	June 2023
4	Approved	Lia Harness	CQC - Chair's Action	21 July 2023	June 2024

## 1. The purpose of this policy

1.1 Students may encounter extenuating circumstances that disrupt their ability to study, affect their progress and/or conduct during their programme of study. This policy sets out Open College of the Arts (OCA) approach to supporting students to make an extenuating circumstances application to:

- 1.1.1 increase the time permitted to complete a unit (extension)
- 1.1.2 increase the time permitted to submit for summative assessment (extension)
- 1.1.3 take a formal study break during a unit (deferral)
- 1.1.4 submit for an alternative summative assessment event (postponement of assessment);
- 1.1.5 take a formal study break between units (interruption)
- 1.1.6 be considered as part of the [Fitness to Study](#) process
- 1.1.7 be considered as part of the [Student Code of Conduct](#) process.

1.2 It also sets out how OCA deals with extraordinary circumstances (section 16). These are events beyond a students, or OCA's control, that disrupts a students ability to study.

- 1.3 Students who need additional time as a result of a disability or long term mental health condition should refer to the [Student Accessibility Policy](#), unless this relates to a change or deterioration of the disability/condition which affects the students ability to study.
- 1.4 Students seeking additional time due to a complaint relating to OCA's service which affects the students ability to study should refer instead to the [Student Complaints and Non-Academic Appeals Procedure](#).

## **2. Who does the policy apply to**

- 2.1 This policy applies to all OCA students whose studies, progress and/or conduct with OCA has been affected by evidenced extenuating circumstances. This includes those undertaking undergraduate study, postgraduate study, and non-accredited study (Short Courses, Foundations courses and Personal Development courses). Where parts of the policy are applicable to certain groups of students only, this will be specified.
- 2.2 Extenuating circumstances must be unforeseen, outside the student's control and be likely to prevent the student from meeting the permitted timeframes and/or deadlines.

## **3. Policies superseded by this document**

- 3.1 This policy supersedes the previous Extensions and Deferrals Policy.

## **4. Linked and other relevant policies and legislation**

- 4.1 This policy is subject to OCAs [Terms and Conditions](#) and the [Academic Regulations for the Subsidiary Institutions of the Open University](#), in particular the following sections:

- 4.1.1 Section C - 7 Period of Registration for Open University Awards delivered by Subsidiary Institution

- 4.1.2 Section C - 8.0 Interruption of Studies

- 4.1.3 Section F - Extenuating Circumstances

- 4.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with all related policies and procedures as detailed within the policy. Also of relevance is the [Active Study Policy](#), [Fitness to Study Policy](#), [Student Code of Conduct](#), and [Summative Assessment Policy](#).

## **5. OCA's guiding principles**

- 5.1 In considering requests for extenuating circumstances, OCA applies the following principles in all cases:
  - 5.1.1 All cases shall be considered by a panel of members (see section 14 - Making an application), with the exception of Short Course extensions (see section 6 - Short Course students) and short deferrals (see section 8 - Undergraduate students)
  - 5.1.2 All cases shall be reviewed without prejudice and judged on their own merits
  - 5.1.3 OCA shall treat all cases and their circumstances in the strictest confidence
  - 5.1.4 All cases shall be considered wholly in line with the relevant regulations outlined in

this policy and any other relevant regulations

5.1.5 OCA shall act with empathy in provision of guidance, consideration of cases, and requests for evidence

## **6. Short Course students**

- 6.1 Short Course students who need an extension to an assignment submission date should request this by emailing their tutor and outlining the reasons for the request. This can be for a maximum of five days and is agreed at the discretion of the course tutor.
- 6.2 Where a student needs a break in study during the short course due to evidenced extenuating circumstances, a deferral to join the next cohort intake can be applied for by following the process in section 14 - Making an application.

## **7. Foundations and Personal Development students**

- 7.1 Where there are evidenced extenuating circumstances, Foundations and Personal Development Learners can follow the process in Section 14 - Making an application - to apply for:
- 7.1.1 an extension to the unit end date - this increases the time permitted to complete the unit and may not exceed 12 months in total whether this is from one application or multiple. This will require supporting evidence.
- 7.1.2 a deferral during the unit - this provides a 'pause' to unit timeframes and may not exceed 12 months in total per unit whether this is from one application or multiple.
- 7.1.2a A short deferral (1 - 3 months) can be applied for once only. Shorter breaks (e.g. holidays, the festive period) should be planned for within the unit timeframe. Students are welcome to provide supporting evidence but for this application, an impact statement will be accepted in lieu of supporting evidence. This should outline how the circumstances which have resulted in the deferral request will impact you and your studies. This will be reviewed by the Learner Support Team.
- 7.1.2b A longer deferral (up to 12 months total) or subsequent deferrals after a short deferral has already been agreed (totalling no more than 12 months altogether) will require supporting evidence.

## **8. Undergraduate students**

- 8.1 Where there are evidenced extenuating circumstances, Undergraduate students can follow the process in Section 14 - Making an application - to apply for:
- 8.1.1 an extension to the unit end date - this increases the time permitted to complete the unit and may not exceed 12 months in total per unit whether this is from one application or multiple. This will require supporting evidence.
- 8.1.2 a deferral during the unit - this provides a 'pause' to unit timeframes and may not exceed 12 months in total per unit whether this is from one application or multiple.

8.1.2a A short deferral (1 - 3 months) can be applied for once per unit only. Shorter breaks (e.g. holidays, the Christmas period) should be planned for within the unit timeframe. Students are welcome to provide supporting evidence but for this application, an impact statement will be accepted in lieu of supporting evidence. This should outline how the circumstances which have resulted in the deferral request will impact you and your studies. This will be reviewed by the Learner Support Team.

8.1.2b A longer deferral (up to 12 months total per unit) or subsequent deferrals after a short deferral has already been agreed (totalling no more than 12 months per unit) will require supporting evidence.

8.1.3 A postponement to the next assessment event - this allows a student to submit at the second assessment event following completion of a unit instead of the first event. This will require supporting evidence.

8.2 After successful assessment of a unit, Undergraduate students can take a study break for up to 6 months from the date the last assessment results were received. This does not require a formal application. Students can also apply for an interruption of studies of up to a further 6 months (totalling 12 months) if they are not ready to progress to the next unit. This must be in line with Section C - 7.0 Period of Registration for Open University Awards delivered by a Subsidiary Institution, and Section C - 8.0 Interruption of Studies in the [Academic Regulations for the Subsidiary Institutions of the Open University](#). This can be applied for as outlined in Section 14 - Making an application - and will require supporting evidence.

## 9. Postgraduate Students

9.1 Where there are evidenced extenuating circumstances, Postgraduate students can follow the process in Section 14 - Making an application - to apply for:

9.1.1 an extension to the summative assessment submission deadline. The deadline to apply is set out in the course schedule on OCA Learn. An extension can be up to a maximum of 2 weeks. Supporting evidence is required.

9.1.2 a deferral during the unit. If agreed the student will need to restart the unit on resuming and so students may also be directed to section 11.4 - 11.5: Exceptional Reduction of Fees. Supporting evidence is required.

9.1.3 a postponement to the next assessment event - this allows a student to submit at the next assessment event following completion of a unit instead of the first event. This will require supporting evidence and will also require the student to delay the start of the next unit until the unit has been assessed and passed, joining another cohort.

9.1.4 an interruption of studies between units, up to a maximum of 12 months. After assessment, Postgraduate students can apply for an interruption of studies if they are not ready to progress to the next unit. The Extenuating Circumstances form should be used and supporting evidence is required. This must be in line with Section C - 7.0 Period of Registration for Open University Awards delivered by a Subsidiary Institution, and Section C

- 8.0 Interruption of Studies in the Academic Regulations for the Subsidiary Institutions of the Open University.

## 10. Requesting an Interruption between units

10.1 As outlined in 7.3 and 8.2, Undergraduate and Postgraduate students can request an interruption between units. This must be in line with Section C - 7.0 Period of Registration for Open University Awards delivered by a Subsidiary Institution, and Section C - 8.0 Interruption of Studies in the [Academic Regulations for the Subsidiary Institutions of the Open University](#). Applications can be made on the extenuating circumstances form as outlined in 14 - Making an application.

## 11. Extenuating Circumstances in other circumstances

11.1 This section outlines other situations where extenuating circumstances may be applied for and is applicable to all students.

11.2 The Extenuating Circumstances Panel (EC Panel) may consider extenuating circumstances applications where a student is subject to an OCA procedure via policies including [Active Study Policy](#), [Fitness to Study Policy](#), [Student Code of Conduct](#), and [Summative Assessment Policy](#).

11.3 For circumstances outlined in 11.2, students should submit an extenuating circumstances request form to the Learner Support Team via the Learner Support Helpdesk, or by email to [learnersupport@oca.ac.uk](mailto:learnersupport@oca.ac.uk), which will include:

11.3.1 an explanation of the extenuating circumstances to be considered

11.3.2 an impact statement covering what impact the circumstances had

11.3.3 supporting evidence as per section 13 - Supporting Evidence.

11.4 The EC Panel may also consider extenuating circumstances applications in relation to exceptional fee reductions. Where a student has to withdraw from their course due to exceptional circumstances, and appropriate institutional support options have been exhausted, the EC Panel will consider whether grounds are met for an exceptional case where the student is outside the cancellation period. The Finance Employment Audit and Risk committee (FEAR) will then approve the level of fee reduction. This may also apply to Postgraduate deferrals. Students should also refer to Section 7.1 of the [Refund and Compensation Policy](#).

11.5 To apply for an exceptional reduction of fees, students should refer to Section 14 - Making an application - and submit an exceptional reduction of fees application to the Learner Support Team ([learnersupport@oca.ac.uk](mailto:learnersupport@oca.ac.uk)) which will include:

11.5.1 an explanation of the extenuating circumstances to be considered

11.5.2 an impact statement covering what impact the circumstances had

11.5.3 an outline of the institutional support options which have been exhausted, or why they are not applicable

11.5.4 supporting evidence from an appropriate third-party professional which supports that the student must withdraw, or defer (Postgraduate only), due to exceptional circumstances.

## **12. Grounds to apply**

12.1 In order for extenuating circumstances to be agreed, the student must demonstrate that the circumstances:

12.1.1 Disrupted their ability to study, or affected their progress and/or conduct during their programme of study

12.1.2 Were outside the student's control and

12.1.2 Were unforeseen and unforeseeable and

12.1.3 Were evidenced to be true and

12.1.4 Were relevant to the affected period/timeframe

12.2 Examples of circumstances which may be accepted include, but are not limited to:

12.2.1 personal illness / health

12.2.2 illness of close relative or dependant

12.2.3 bereavement

12.2.4 sudden deterioration of a long-term condition

12.2.5 loss of employment

12.2.6 pregnancy or maternity leave will also be accepted where the application is for a deferral during a unit

12.3 Examples of circumstances which will not normally be accepted include, but are not limited to:

12.3.1 holiday / leisure travel

12.3.2 house move / renovation

12.3.3 employment commitments

12.3.4 circumstances that occurred outside the period in question

12.3.5 personal computer / printer problems

12.3.6 poor study practice

12.3.7 insufficient IT knowledge to engage with the course

12.3.8 claiming ignorance of due dates / times for submission of assignments and / or work for assessment

12.3.9 poor time management

12.4 Students with existing health conditions / disabilities can be given additional time in accordance with the [Student Accessibility Policy](#). For extensions outside of this, students are still expected to meet the above criteria.

### 13. Supporting Evidence

13.1 Supporting evidence must be from an independent, third-party professional / qualified practitioner and include dates relevant to the affected period in question. Evidence should not include photographs / images, except where these are photographs of documentation.

13.2 Evidence may include, but is not limited to:

13.2.1 medical / health certificate confirming that the student is unable to study, and the period this relates to (ie from a GP, counsellor, mental health team or other medical professional)

13.2.2 death certificate / interim death certificate or other evidence

13.3.3 an official document such as a police report, including a police reference number, court summons or other legal document

13.3.4 letter from a solicitor, social worker or other official agency

13.3.5 supporting letter from a Learner Support Adviser where the student has been in regular, sustained contact during the relevant period

If evidence is in a foreign language, it is the student's responsibility to have it independently translated by an accredited translator, prior to submission. If there are associated costs with the supporting evidence and this is prohibitive for the student, it may be possible to apply to the Learner Support Scheme to fund this.

### 14. Making an application

14.1 We advise you to contact the Learner Support Team at the time the circumstances occur and submit the appropriate paperwork in advance of the relevant deadline. Learner Support can be contacted via the Learner Support Helpdesk, by emailing [learnersupport@oca.ac.uk](mailto:learnersupport@oca.ac.uk) or calling 01226 978618.

14.2 In exceptional cases where it can be shown it was not possible to submit an application at the time, we will consider retrospective applications. This will require supporting evidence; please refer to the sections 12 (Grounds) and 13 (Supporting Evidence) for more information.

14.3 In all cases other than Short Course extensions, applications should be made on the relevant form:

- UG, Foundations or Personal Development student extension to unit end date- [extension request form](#)
- UG or PG extension to summative assessment deadline - [extension request form](#)
- UG, Foundations, Personal Development or PG student deferral - [deferral request form](#)
- UG or PG postponement of assessment - [deferral request form](#)
- UG or PG interruption of studies between units - extenuating circumstances form
- Exceptional reduction of fees - [exceptional reduction of fees request form](#)



- All other extenuating circumstances (e.g. Fitness to Study, Student Code of Conduct) - [extenuating circumstances form](#)

The extension forms as listed above is one extension form that covers all extensions; you will indicate on the form what you are applying for (e.g. extension to unit end date, or PG extension to summative assessment deadline). Similarly, the deferral forms as listed above is one form that covers all deferrals; you will indicate on the form what you are applying for (e.g. short deferral, longer deferral, or postponement of assessment).

- 14.4 Please title your request accordingly (e.g. Extension Application / Deferral Application) and send your application form with supporting evidence via the Learner Support Helpdesk or by email to [learnersupport@oca.ac.uk](mailto:learnersupport@oca.ac.uk). Postal applications can be sent to the Head Office address (section 22 - Contact Us) for the attention of the Learner Support Team.
- 14.5 Your application and supporting evidence will be reviewed by the clerk to ensure it is complete. You will receive notification when your application is sent to the panel. If the form is incomplete and / or we need further evidence, we will inform you in writing, giving you a deadline for providing the additional information.
- 14.6 Decisions will be made by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (EC Panel) other than for short deferrals (see section 7 - Foundations and Personal Development students, and section 8 - Undergraduate students). The EC Panel will comprise of the Director of Learning and Teaching (Chair), a Programme Leader representative, Head of Quality & Academic Support (or nominated representative) and Head of Student Services (Deputy Chair). Quoracy will be three members of the panel including the panel chair.
- 14.7 The panel has up to 20 working days to provide a response from the date of your receipt notification from the clerk.
- 14.8 The panel will consider your existing progress on the unit in making their decision and will determine what constitutes reasonable progress. If the request is agreed, the panel will consider the time left available on the unit and degree course, the assignments remaining, and the period requested.
- 14.9 The panel, in reviewing your case, may request further information and/or evidence from you in order to help to make their decision. Where additional information and/or evidence is requested, this should be provided within 10 working days, unless there is a good reason for a delay.
- 14.10 In considering your case, the panel may offer alternatives to what has been requested where it is felt that an alternative solution may provide a better outcome to you and your studies.
- 14.11 In coming to their decision, the clerk will write to you with the panel outcome, setting out the reasons for their decision. This is known as the Panel Outcome Notice.



- 14.12 Extensions will not extend the maximum period of study other than where this is approved by the OCA Principal in accordance with [Section 7 - Period of registration for Open University awards delivered by a Subsidiary Institution](#).
- 14.13 Decisions of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel are final and may not be appealed except where it is believed an administrative error has occurred. Students should refer to the [Student Complaints and Non-Academic Appeals Procedure](#).

## **15. Financial Implications**

- 15.1 Self-funded students with an instalment plan in place will remain liable for payments during any period of deferral. Students who are struggling to meet their payments should contact the Finance Team to discuss potential options ([accounts@oca.ac.uk](mailto:accounts@oca.ac.uk)).
- 15.2 For students funding their studies via Student Finance, OCA has a responsibility to report to Student Finance in line with the [Active Study Policy](#).
- 15.2.1 For deferrals of up to three months, students will continue to be marked in attendance for funding purposes. Tuition fees, maintenance loans and grants will not be affected, and DSA support will continue where applicable.
- 15.2.2 For deferrals over three months, students will be marked as suspended with Student Finance. Tuition fees, maintenance loans and grants, and DSA support will be suspended. Students will be liable for any fees not covered by their funding body if they subsequently withdraw from the course.
- 15.3 Other than where an exceptional case is agreed, there will be no reduction of fees where an extenuating circumstances application has been declined.

## **16. Extraordinary circumstances**

- 16.1 In certain circumstances the provisions covered in sections 12, 13, and 14 above cannot apply due to events beyond a students and OCA's control. In such situations, normal requirements on grounds and evidence may be relaxed for extensions to a unit end date or a deferral during a unit. These circumstances cover such examples as below. Please note this is not meant to be an exhaustive list:
- 16.2.1 War
  - 16.2.2 Civil unrest
  - 16.2.3 Famine
  - 16.2.4 Drought
  - 16.2.5 Public Health Emergency, such as pandemics
  - 16.2.6 Natural disasters
  - 16.2.7 Strike or industrial disputes
  - 16.2.8 Fire, flood, or storm
  - 16.2.9 Compliance with any law or governmental order

- 16.2 Circumstances deemed to be extraordinary are made at the discretion of OCA, and always in accordance with advice, guidance, or instruction from the UK government, and/or any intergovernmental organisation such as the World Health Organisation as appropriate.
- 16.3 In such circumstances, requests for extensions to a unit end date or a deferral during a unit will not require supporting evidence in order to be considered but clear impact statements may be required.
- 16.4 In addition, the normal requirement to make applications for extension or deferral at the time they occur is suspended.
- 16.5 During a period of extraordinary circumstances, requests for an extension or deferral of up to six months will be considered and processed by our Learner Support team. No application for these is required, all that is needed is a message via the Learner Support Helpdesk or an email to [learnersupport@oca.ac.uk](mailto:learnersupport@oca.ac.uk) to request the extension or deferral. You will need to state your name and student number, why you are requesting an extension or deferral, and how long this should be for.
- 16.6 Requests for extensions or deferrals greater than six months during a period of extraordinary circumstances will be considered as normal by the EC Panel, subject to clause 16.3.
- 16.7 During any period of extraordinary circumstances, suspensions and restrictions of normal practice will be under regular review of no less than once per three months.
- 16.8 If extraordinary measures remain in place for a period longer than six months, a new request or application for further extension and/or deferral is not required. In this context, we will apply further extension/deferral as necessary in line with government and/or intergovernmental advice, guidance, and/or instruction.
- 16.9 Where rules are relaxed, these provisions cease to be in effect from the point at which government and/or intergovernmental advice, guidance, and/or instruction changes.
- 16.10 Where extraordinary suspensions and restrictions to normal OCA services and practices are implemented, we will communicate this to students as soon as is practicable, by email, and through the OCA forums.
- 16.11 Students who have previously been rejected for an extension or deferral under normal operating rules may apply again for an extension or deferral but must do so under the grounds of extraordinary circumstances. A clear impact statement will be required.

## **17. Return to Study**

- 17.1 After a period of deferral or interruption, OCA will engage with students to discuss their return to study in line with the [Fitness to Study Policy](#). It may be that after the initial deferral or interruption, circumstances are such that a longer deferral or interruption is required provided this does not exceed the maximums outlined.

- 17.2 Students who have had a deferral (UG) or interruption (PG) to their studies will be contacted by a member of OCA staff to discuss their circumstances and consider returning to study, and/or any additional support that may be put in place.
- 17.3 If during the course of the conversation no issues are flagged, return to study will proceed as normal. Depending on the length of the deferral, a new tutor may need to be allocated.
- 17.4 If during the course of the conversation issues of concern are raised around return to study that do not restrict return to study, additional forms of support may be explored to facilitate this. This is considered on a case by case basis, and additional support is allocated in line with the [Student Accessibility Policy](#).
- 17.5 If during the course of the conversation a return to study is considered not feasible, an extension to the deferral may be granted at the discretion of the Chair of the EC Panel in line with the maximums outlined in sections 6 - 10. Additional evidence may be required and will be considered on a case by case basis.

## **18. Support for the policy**

- 18.1 Students should seek advice and guidance from the Learner Support Team via the Learner Support Helpdesk or by emailing [learnersupport@oca.ac.uk](mailto:learnersupport@oca.ac.uk) prior to making an extenuating circumstances application.
- 18.2 Guidance notes on making applications are included in the separate application forms.

## **19. Control of the policy**

- 19.1 This policy was authored by Lia Harness, Senior Learner Support Adviser, and Craig Dewis, Head of Student Services in consultation with OCA Staff and given approval through OCA Strategic Operations Group in July 2023.

## **20. Reviewing the policy**

- 20.1 OCA will work closely with the OCA Student Association (SA) to gather student feedback on the outline of the policy, its intentions, the administration of the policy, and a review of all these points in practice. These will then be fed into the next review point for the policy.
- 20.2 If you would like to raise any issues around this policy then you should contact either the Learner Support team directly via the Learner Support Helpdesk, or at [learnersupport@oca.ac.uk](mailto:learnersupport@oca.ac.uk), or if you are a student, you might also wish to raise these with the appropriate OCA SA representative.

## **21. Changes from the last policy**

- Addition of the Learner Support Helpdesk throughout the policy as a method of contacting the team / applying for extenuating circumstances;
- Changes of nomenclature from 'course' to unit or programme of study;
- Clarification given regarding short deferrals which are now reviewed by the Learner Support Team rather than the EC panel;

- Further detail given in section 11 regarding exceptional reduction of fees process to clarify where these are reviewed.

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## **22. Contact Us**

22.1 OCA's registered address is:

The Michael Young Arts Centre  
Room 301, DMC 02  
County Way  
Barnsley  
S70 2AG