

Open College of the Arts (OCA)

Extensions and Deferrals policy

The purpose of the policy

Occasionally students may encounter circumstances that disrupt their ability to study and need to apply for an extension or deferral to help get back on track. This policy sets out OCA's approach to supporting extensions and deferrals applications for undergraduate and foundation students, and interruptions for postgraduate students. It also sets out how OCA deals with events beyond a students, or OCA's control, that disrupts students ability to study.

Who does the policy apply to?

This policy applies to all OCA students.

OCA's guiding principles

In considering requests for an extension or a deferral to studies, OCA applies the following principles in all cases:

- All cases shall be considered by a panel of members
- All cases shall be reviewed without prejudice and judged on their own merits
- OCA shall treat all cases and their circumstances in the strictest confidence
- All cases shall be considered wholly in line with the relevant regulations outlined in this policy and any other relevant regulations
- OCA shall act with empathy in provision of guidance, consideration of cases, and requests for evidence

Related OCA policies and procedures

This policy is part of the Student Regulations. Undergraduate students should refer to this policy in conjunction with the following sections of the Academic Regulatory Framework (ARF):-

- Section 2.3 - Maximum period of registration for full degree;
- Section 2.4 - Maximum period allowed for completion of levels and individual units;
- Section 2.5 - Deferrals.

Postgraduate students should refer to this policy in conjunction with UCA's Common Credit Framework (CCF).

Short Course or Personal Development Learners should refer to this policy in conjunction with the Non-Accredited Framework (NAF).

Students who need additional time as a result of a disability or long term mental health condition may be redirected to the Reasonable Adjustments policy.

Also of relevance is the OCA Active Study Policy and OCA Student Protection Plan.

Extensions and Deferrals policy

1. Extensions

- 1.1. An extension adds more time to unit and/or level timeframes to help students catch up their studies after a period of disruption.
- 1.2. Any student who experiences delays to their studies may be eligible to apply for an extension to their unit and level timeframes.
- 1.3. Delays must be unforeseen, outside a student's control and be likely to prevent the student from completing their unit or level of study within the permitted timeframes.
- 1.4. We advise students 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 learnersupport@oca.ac.uk or 01226 777 593.
- 1.5. In exceptional cases where it can be shown it was not possible to submit at the time, we will consider retrospective applications provided they are not outside of the course deadlines. This will require supporting evidence; please refer to the sections on Grounds and Supporting Evidence for more information.
- 1.6. Short Course students who need a short extension to an assignment submission date should apply to their tutor. This can be for a maximum of five days and is agreed at the discretion of the course tutor.
- 1.7. To request an extension, please complete the extension / deferral request form. This will require supporting evidence; please refer to the sections on Grounds and Supporting Evidence for more information.
- 1.8. Where there is enough time remaining in the overall twelve year limit, any period of extension will be added to the level timeframes, so as not to impact on the time remaining for other units. Students may only apply for one extension per unit.
- 1.9. Unless stated explicitly otherwise, extensions and deferrals do not lead to any extension to the overall timeframes for completion of a degree. An extension to the maximum period of registration may only be granted in exceptional circumstances and where the reason for the extension has been approved formally by the Director of Academic Services of the validating body, UCA.

2. Deferrals

- 2.1. A deferral provides a study break or pause to unit and/or level timeframes, so students have time to deal with any periods of disruption.
- 2.2. Any Foundation, Personal Development or Undergraduate student who requires a break of three or more months during a unit may be eligible to apply for a deferral. Postgraduate students should refer to the section on Interruptions. Deferrals do not apply to Short Courses.
- 2.3. Where there is enough time remaining in the overall twelve year limit, any period of deferral will be added to the level timeframes, so as not to impact on the time remaining for other units. Students may only apply for one deferral per unit.
- 2.4. Three month deferral (not applicable to Short / Postgraduate courses) This is the minimum deferral period. Any breaks in study shorter than this, e.g. a holiday, the Christmas period, should be planned for within the unit timeframe.
- 2.5. Students should complete the deferral request form to apply for a three month deferral. You should provide an impact statement outlining how the circumstances which have resulted in your deferral request will impact you and your studies. You will not be required to evidence these circumstances but may wish to do so.
- 2.6. Deferral of more than three months (not applicable to Short / Postgraduate courses) Students requiring a deferral of more than three months may apply for this providing there are evidenced grounds. Deferrals cannot exceed more than twelve months in total within any one unit.
- 2.7. To request a deferral in excess of three months, please complete the deferral request form. This will require supporting evidence; please refer to the sections on Grounds and Supporting Evidence for more information.
- 2.8. This will be reviewed by the Extensions and Deferrals Panel (see also: Making an application).
- 2.9. Deferral of assessment Any student who experiences delays which are unforeseen, outside a student's control and will prevent them from submitting their work at their final formal assessment opportunity may apply to defer assessment.
- 2.10. Undergraduate students should refer to Academic Regulatory Framework, Section 3.3 for assessment events for Undergraduate students. If deferred assessment is awarded, this will be for the third assessment event following completion of the unit. There can be no further deferral beyond this event.
- 2.11. Postgraduate students should refer to UCA's Common Credit Framework, Section 4.8 Deferred assessment. If deferred assessment is awarded,

students will normally be permitted to undergo assessment during a specified resit period.

- 2.12. To request a deferral of assessment, please complete the deferral request form. This will require supporting evidence; please refer to the sections on Grounds and Supporting Evidence for more information.

3. Interruptions (applicable to Postgraduate students only)

- 3.1. An interruption is an extended period of absence from the course requested as a result of circumstances which must be unforeseen, beyond the control of the student, and with the potential to impact significantly, adversely, and for a substantial duration on the student's studies. To request an interruption, please complete a Change of Status form. This will require supporting evidence; please refer to the sections on Grounds and Supporting Evidence for more information.

4. Grounds

- 4.1. In order for an extension, deferral or interruption to be agreed, the student must adequately demonstrate that the circumstances:

- were outside the student's control;
- were unforeseen and unforeseeable;
- were evidenced to be true;
- were relevant to the affected period/time-frame;

- 4.2. The circumstances will also result in at least one of the following:

- prevent the student from completing their assignments by the unit or level deadline;
- prevent the student applying for/submitting by the formal assessment deadline;
- require the student to have an extended break in study.

- 4.3. Examples of circumstances which may be accepted include, but are not limited to:

- personal illness/health
- illness of close relative or dependant
- bereavement
- sudden deterioration of a long-term condition
- loss of employment.
- Pregnancy or maternity leave will also be accepted where the application is for a deferral during a unit.

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

- holiday/leisure travel

- house move / renovation
- employment commitments
- circumstances that occurred outside the period in question
- personal computer / printer problems
- poor study practice
- insufficient IT knowledge to engage with the course
- Claiming ignorance of due dates/ times for submission of assignments and/or work for assessment
- poor time management

4.5. Students with existing health conditions / disabilities can be given additional time in accordance with the Reasonable Adjustments policy. For extensions outside of this, students are still expected to meet the above criteria.

5. Supporting Evidence

5.1. Supporting evidence is required in all cases, with the exception of the three-month deferral. This 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.

5.2. Evidence may include, but is not limited to:

- 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)
- death certificate/interim death certificate or other evidence
- an official document such as police report, including a police reference number, court summons or other legal document
- letter from a solicitor, social worker or other official agency
- 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.

6. Making an application

6.1. Applications should be made on the relevant form which is available on the OCA website. Please title your email accordingly (Extension Application, Deferral Application or Interruption Application), and send your application form with any required supporting evidence to learnersupport@oca.ac.uk

Postal applications can be sent to the Head Office address for the attention of the Learner Support Team.

- 6.2. Your application and supporting evidence will be reviewed to ensure it is complete. You will receive notification that we have received your completed claim. 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.
- 6.3. Decisions will be made by the Extensions and Deferrals Panel. The Extensions and Deferrals Panel will be the Director of Learning and Teaching (Chair), Programme Leader representative, Head of Quality & Academic Support and Head of Student Services. Quoracy will be three members of the panel including the panel chair.
- 6.4. Students will receive a response within 20 working days of their claim receipt.
- 6.5. The panel will consider a student's 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.
- 6.6. Decisions of the Extensions and Deferrals Panel are final and may not be appealed.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. Self-funded students with an instalment plan in place will remain liable for payments during any period of deferral.
- 7.2. For students funding their studies via Student Finance, OCA has a responsibility to report to Student Finance in line with the Active Study policy. For deferrals of 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.
- 7.3. 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.

8. Force Majeure

- 8.1. In certain circumstances the provisions covered in clauses 1, 2, and 3 above cannot apply due to events beyond a student's and OCA's control. In such situations, normal requirements on grounds and evidence may be relaxed. These events, collectively known as force majeure, cover such examples as below. Please note this is not meant to be an exhaustive list:

- War

- Civil unrest
 - Famine
 - Drought
 - Public Health Emergency, such as pandemics
 - Natural disasters
 - Strike or industrial disputes
 - Fire, flood, or storm
 - Compliance with any law or governmental order
- 8.2. Events deemed to be force majeure 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.
- 8.3. In such events, requests for extensions and deferrals will not require supporting evidence in order to be considered.
- 8.4. In addition, the normal requirement to make applications for extension or deferral at the time they occur is suspended.
- 8.5. During a period of force majeure, 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 an email to 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.
- 8.6. Requests for extensions or deferrals greater than six months during a period of force majeure will be considered as normal by the Extensions and Deferral Panel, subject to clause 8.3.
- 8.7. During any period of force majeure, suspensions and restrictions of normal practice will be under regular review of no less than once per three months.
- 8.8. If force majeure 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.
- 8.9. Where rules are relaxed under force majeure, these provisions cease to be in effect from the point at which government and/or intergovernmental advice, guidance, and/or instruction changes.
- 8.10. Where force majeure suspensions and restrictions are implemented, we will communicate this to students as soon as is practicable, by email, and through the OCA Discussion forums.

- 8.11. Students who have previously been rejected an extension or deferral under normal operating rules may apply again for an extension or deferral but must do so under the grounds of the force majeure event.

9. Support for the policy

- 9.1. Students should seek advice and guidance from the Learner Support Team prior to applying for an extension or deferral.
- 9.2. Guidance notes on making applications are included in the separate application forms for both extensions and deferrals.

10. Control of the policy

- 10.1. 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 Oversight Management Group in April 2020.

11. Reviewing the policy

- 11.1. OCA will work closely with OCASA 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.
- 11.2. The next review date is June 2021. If you would like to raise any issues around this policy then you should contact either the Learner Support team directly at learnersupport@oca.ac.uk, or if you are a student, you might also wish to raise these with the appropriate OCASA representative.