

Open College of the Arts (OCA)

Extensions and Deferrals policy

Document History

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	Draft	Lia Harness	OMG	July 2022	June 2023

1. The purpose of this policy

1.1 Students may encounter circumstances that disrupt their ability to study, affect their progress and/or conduct during the course. This policy sets out OCA's approach to supporting students to make an extenuating circumstances application to:

- increase the time permitted to complete a unit (extension);
- increase the time to submit for summative assessment (extension);
- take a formal study break during a unit (deferral);
- submit for an alternative summative assessment event (deferral of assessment);
- take a formal study break between units (interruption);
- be considered as part of the Fitness to Study process;
- be considered as part of the Student Code of Conduct process.

It also sets out how OCA deals with events beyond a students, or OCA's control, that disrupts students ability to study.

2. Who does the policy apply to?

2.1 This policy applies to all OCA students on short and foundation courses, and on undergraduate and postgraduate degrees who are seeking an extension or deferral solely on the basis of evidenced mitigating circumstances. Where parts of the policy are applicable to certain groups of students only this will be specified.

3. Linked and other relevant policies and legislation

3.1 This policy is subject to OCAs [Terms and Conditions](#).

3.2 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.

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

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

3.4 Students who need additional time as a result of a disability or long term mental health condition may be redirected to the [Student Accessibility Policy](#).

3.5 Students seeking additional time due to a complaint relating to OCA's service should refer instead to the [Student Complaints and Non-Academic Appeals Procedure](#).

3.6 Also of relevance is the [Active Study Policy](#), [Fitness to Study Policy](#), [Student Code of Conduct](#), [Summative Assessment Policy](#) and OCA [Student Protection Plan](#).

4. OCA's guiding principles

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

4.1.1 All cases shall be considered by a panel of members with the exception of Short Courses (see 5.7)

4.1.2 All cases shall be reviewed without prejudice and judged on their own merits

4.1.3 OCA shall treat all cases and their circumstances in the strictest confidence

4.1.4 All cases shall be considered wholly in line with the relevant regulations outlined in this policy and any other relevant regulations

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

5. Extensions

5.1 An extension adds more time to unit and/or level timeframes to help students catch up their studies after a period of disruption.

5.2 Any student who experiences delays to their studies may be eligible to apply for an extension to their unit and level timeframes.

5.3 Extensions may not exceed 12 months in total per unit whether this is from one application or multiple.

5.4 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.

5.5 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 978618.

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

- 5.7 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.
- 5.8 To request an extension, please complete the [extension request form](#) (internal use only). You will be required to submit supporting evidence as part of your application; please refer to the sections on Grounds and Supporting Evidence for more information.
- 5.9 Where there is enough time remaining in the overall twelve year limit for undergraduate degrees, any period of extension will be added to the level timeframes, so as not to impact on the time remaining for other units.
- 5.10 Unless stated explicitly otherwise, extensions and deferrals do not lead to any extension to the overall timeframes for completion of an undergraduate 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.

6. Deferrals

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 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. For Short Courses, an agreed deferral will allow the student to join the next cohort intake.
- 6.3 Where there is enough time remaining in the overall twelve year limit for undergraduate degrees, any period of deferral will be added to the level timeframes, so as not to impact on the time remaining for other units.
- 6.4 Deferrals may not exceed 12 months in total per unit whether this is from one application or multiple, and students may only apply for one short deferral per unit; further applications will be subject to panel agreement.
- 6.5 Short deferrals are between one and three months. These are not applicable to Short Course / Postgraduate courses. Any breaks in study shorter than this, e.g. a holiday, the Christmas period, should be planned for within the unit timeframe.
- 6.6 Students should complete the deferral request form to apply for a short 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.
- 6.7 Students requiring a deferral of more than three months (not applicable to Short / Postgraduate courses) may apply for this providing there are evidenced grounds. Deferrals cannot exceed more than twelve months in total within any one unit.
- 6.8 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.

- 6.9 This will be reviewed by the Extensions and Deferrals Panel (see also: Making an application).
- 6.10 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.
- 6.11 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 second assessment event following completion of the unit. There can be no further deferral beyond this event.
- 6.12 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.
- 6.13 To request a deferral of assessment, please complete the [deferral request form](#) (internal use only). You will be required to submit supporting evidence as part of your application; please refer to the sections on Grounds and Supporting Evidence for more information.

7. Interruptions

- 7.1 In Postgraduate courses, 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 request form. This will require supporting evidence; please refer to the sections on Grounds and Supporting Evidence for more information.
- 7.2 For students on undergraduate courses, an interruption is a period of absence from the programme of study either between units, or between stages. In the case of interruptions between units, these cannot exceed 6 months (please see the [Academic Regulatory Framework](#)). In addition, where this interruption is notified in advance to OCA, this period of interruption will not count towards your study time at a given stage. Interruptions between stages always count towards the overall 12 year timeframe for a degree.

8. Grounds

- 8.1 In order for an extension, deferral or interruption to be agreed, the student must demonstrate that the circumstances:
- 8.1.1 Were outside the student's control and,
 - 8.1.2 Were unforeseen and unforeseeable and,
 - 8.1.3 Were evidenced to be true and,
 - 8.1.4 Were relevant to the affected period/time-frame.
- 8.2 The circumstances will also result in at least one of the following:
- 8.2.1 Prevent the student from completing their assignments/projects by the unit or level deadline or,
 - 8.2.2 Prevent the student submitting their work for assessment by the formal assessment deadline or,

8.2.3 Require the student to have an extended break in study.

8.3 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.

8.4 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

8.5 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.

9. Supporting Evidence

9.1 Supporting evidence is required in all cases, with the exception of the three-month deferral or interruptions between units on an undergraduate degree programme. Where evidence is not required an impact statement must be included. 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.

9.2 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.

10. Making an application

- 10.1 Applications should be made on the relevant form available in the [Student Handbook](#) on OCA Learn. 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.
- 10.2 Your application and supporting evidence will be reviewed 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.
- 10.3 Decisions will be made by the Extenuating Circumstances (EC) 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.
- 10.4 The panel have up to 20 working days to provide a response.
- 10.5 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.
- 10.6 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.
- 10.7 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.
- 10.8 In coming to their decision, the panel will write to you with their outcome, setting out the reasons for their decision. This is known as the Panel Outcome Notice.
- 10.9 Decisions of the Extensions and Deferrals 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](#).

11. Financial Implications

- 11.1 Self-funded students with an instalment plan in place will remain liable for payments during any period of deferral.

11.2 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.

11.3 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.

12. Extraordinary circumstances

12.1 In certain circumstances the provisions covered in clauses 1, 2, and 3 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. These events 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

12.2 Events 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.

12.3 In such events, requests for extensions and deferrals will not require supporting evidence in order to be considered but clear impact statements may be required.

12.4 In addition, the normal requirement to make applications for extension or deferral at the time they occur is suspended.

12.5 During a period of extraordinary events, 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.

12.6 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.

12.7 During any period of an extraordinary event, suspensions and restrictions of normal practice will be under regular review of no less than once per three months.

- 12.8 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.
- 12.9 Where rules are relaxed section 12, these provisions cease to be in effect from the point at which government and/or intergovernmental advice, guidance, and/or instruction changes.
- 12.10 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 Discussion forums.
- 12.11 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 extraordinary event. A clear impact statement will be required.

13. Return to Study

- 13.1 After a period of deferral or interruption, OCA will engage with students to determine fitness to return to study. 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 within 6.6 (deferrals) and 7.2 (interruptions).
- 13.2 Students who have had a deferral or interruption to their studies will be contacted by a member of OCA to discuss their circumstances and consider returning to study, and/or any additional support that may be put in place.
- 13.3 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.
- 13.4 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 at the discretion of OCA.
- 13.5 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 Extensions and Deferrals Panel in line with the maximums outlined in 6.4. Additional evidence may be required, and will be considered on a case by case basis. Any additional deferral granted is awarded in accordance with paragraph 6.3.

14. Support for the policy

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

15. Control of the policy

15.1 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 June 2022.

16. Reviewing the policy

16.1 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.

16.2 The next review date is June 2023. 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.