

# Extenuating Circumstances Policy

## From August 2024

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## 1. Policy Summary

- 1.1. OCA recognises that you may encounter extenuating circumstances that disrupt your ability to study, affect your progress and/or conduct during your studies. 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 13). These are events beyond a students, or OCA's control, that disrupts a students ability to study.

## 2. Scope

- 2.1. **What does this policy cover?**
  - 2.1.1. This policy applies to all students enrolled to OCA study options, on either undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, or on short or foundation courses.
  - 2.1.2. This policy covers circumstances out of your control that mean you need additional time or changes to the normal structure to complete your studies.
  - 2.1.3. Extenuating circumstances must be unforeseen, outside your control and be likely to prevent you from meeting the permitted timeframes and/or deadlines.
  - 2.1.4. This includes an extension to study time limits, a deferral or break away from study, or an interruption; a period of time between units on a qualification.
  - 2.1.5. It also covers other extenuating circumstances that impact your ability to study.
  - 2.1.6. The policy covers [how to apply](#) for support, what the [eligibility criteria](#) is, and [what you need to provide in your application](#).

## 2.2. What does this policy not cover?

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

## 3. General Principles

- 3.1. In considering requests for extenuating circumstances, OCA applies the following principles in all cases:
  - 3.1.1. All cases shall be considered by a panel of members (see section 11 - [Making an application](#)), with the exception of Short Course extensions (see section 4 - [Short Courses](#)) and short deferrals (see section 6 - [Undergraduate degrees](#)).
  - 3.1.2. All cases shall be reviewed without prejudice and judged on their own merits.
  - 3.1.3. OCA shall treat all cases and their circumstances in the strictest confidence.
  - 3.1.4. All cases shall be considered wholly in line with the relevant regulations outlined in this policy and any other relevant regulations.
  - 3.1.5. OCA shall act with empathy in provision of guidance, consideration of cases, and requests for evidence.

## 4. Short Courses

- 4.1. 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.
- 4.2. 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 11 - [Making an application](#).

## 5. Foundation Courses and Personal Development

- 5.1. Where you have evidenced extenuating circumstances, Foundations

and Personal Development Learners can follow the process in Section 11 - [Making an application](#) - to apply for:

- 5.1.1. An extension to the unit end date - this increases the time permitted to complete the unit. The extension may not exceed 12 months in total whether this is from one application or multiple. You will need to provide supporting evidence.
- 5.1.2. 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.
  - 5.1.2.1. 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.
  - 5.1.2.2. 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.

## 6. Undergraduate degrees

- 6.1. Where there are evidenced extenuating circumstances, Undergraduate students can follow the process in Section 11 - [Making an application](#) - to apply for:
  - 6.1.1. 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.
  - 6.1.2. 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.
    - 6.1.2.1. 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.

- 6.1.2.2. 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.
- 6.1.3. 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.
- 6.2. If you apply for and are successfully awarded a deferral (of any length), and are funded through Student Finance England, Wales, or Northern Ireland, a suspension of study will be confirmed for the duration of your deferral.
- 6.3. 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 11 - [Making an application](#) - and will require supporting evidence.

## 7. Postgraduate degrees

- 7.1. Where there are evidenced extenuating circumstances, Postgraduate students can follow the process in Section 11 - [Making an application](#) - to apply for:
  - 7.1.1. 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.

- 7.1.2. 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 paragraphs 11.4 - 11.5: Exceptional Reduction of Fees. Supporting evidence is required.
- 7.1.3. 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.
- 7.1.4. 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](#).

## 8. Other Extenuating Circumstances

- 8.1. This section outlines other situations where extenuating circumstances may be applied for and is applicable to all students.
- 8.2. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel (EC Panel) may consider extenuating circumstances applications where you are subject to an OCA procedure via policies including [Active Study Policy](#), [Fitness to Study Policy](#), [Student Code of Conduct](#), and [Summative Assessment Policy](#).
- 8.3. If you are experiencing one or more of the circumstances outlined in 8.2, you 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). You must also include:
  - 8.3.1. An explanation of the extenuating circumstances to be considered, AND;
  - 8.3.2. An impact statement covering what impact the circumstances had, AND;
  - 8.3.3. Supporting evidence as per section 10 - Supporting Evidence.
- 8.4. The EC Panel may also consider extenuating circumstances applications in relation to exceptional fee reductions. If you have had to

withdraw from your course due to exceptional circumstances, the EC Panel may consider exceptional cases where you are outside the cancellation period.

- 8.4.1. To be eligible for an exceptional case fee reduction (or refund if appropriate) you must have exhausted all institutional support options. This includes extensions or deferrals or any other support offered by OCA. If you have not exhausted all support options your application will be rejected.
- 8.4.2. The level of fee reduction is confirmed by the Head of Student Services according to OCA's Fee Liability Matrix. This may also apply to Postgraduate deferrals. Students should also refer to Section 7.3 of the [Student Fees Policy](#).
- 8.5. To apply for an exceptional reduction of fees, students should refer to Section 11 - [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:
  - 8.5.1. An explanation of the extenuating circumstances to be considered, AND;
  - 8.5.2. An impact statement covering what impact the circumstances had, AND;
  - 8.5.3. An outline of the institutional support options which have been exhausted, or why they are not applicable, AND;
  - 8.5.4. Supporting evidence from an appropriate third-party professional which supports that the student must withdraw, or defer (Postgraduate only), due to exceptional circumstances.

## 9. Grounds to Apply

- 9.1. In order for extenuating circumstances to be agreed, the student must demonstrate that the circumstances:
  - 9.1.1. Disrupted their ability to study, or affected their progress and/or conduct during their programme of study, AND;
  - 9.1.2. Were outside the student's control, AND;
  - 9.1.3. Were unforeseen and unforeseeable, AND;
  - 9.1.4. Were evidenced to be true, AND;
  - 9.1.5. Were relevant to the affected period/timeframe.
- 9.2. Examples of circumstances which may be accepted include, but are not limited to:
  - 9.2.1. Personal illness / health

- 9.2.2. Illness of close relative or dependant
  - 9.2.3. Bereavement
  - 9.2.4. Sudden deterioration of a long-term condition
  - 9.2.5. Loss of employment
  - 9.2.6. Pregnancy or maternity leave will also be accepted where the application is for a deferral during a unit
- 9.3. Examples of circumstances which will not normally be accepted include, but are not limited to:
- 9.3.1. Holiday / leisure travel
  - 9.3.2. House move / renovation
  - 9.3.3. Employment commitments
  - 9.3.4. Circumstances that occurred outside the period in question
  - 9.3.5. Personal computer / printer problems
  - 9.3.6. Poor study practice
  - 9.3.7. Insufficient IT knowledge to engage with the course
  - 9.3.8. Claiming ignorance of due dates / times for submission of assignments and / or work for assessment
  - 9.3.9. Poor time management
- 9.4. 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.

## 10. Supporting Evidence

- 10.1. 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.
- 10.2. Evidence may include, but is not limited to:
- 10.2.1. 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)
  - 10.2.2. Death certificate / interim death certificate or other evidence
  - 10.2.3. An official document such as a police report, including a police reference number, court summons or other legal document
  - 10.2.4. Letter from a solicitor, social worker or other official agency

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

10.3. If your evidence is in a foreign language, it is your 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 you, it may be possible to apply to the Learner Support Scheme to fund this.

## 11. Making an application

11.1. 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.

11.2. 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 9 ([Grounds](#)) and 10 ([Supporting Evidence](#)) for more information.

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

11.3.1. UG, Foundations or Personal Development student extension to unit end date - [extension request form](#).

11.3.2. UG or PG extension to summative assessment deadline - [extension request form](#).

11.3.3. UG, Foundations, Personal Development or PG student deferral - [deferral request form](#).

11.3.4. UG or PG postponement of assessment - [deferral request form](#).

11.3.5. UG or PG interruption of studies between units - [extenuating circumstances form](#).

11.3.6. Exceptional reduction of fees - [exceptional reduction of fees request form](#).

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

11.4. 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).

- 11.5. 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 18 - Contact Us) for the attention of the Learner Support Team.
- 11.6. 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.
- 11.7. Decisions will be made by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (EC Panel) other than for short deferrals (see section 5 - [Foundations and Personal Development](#), and section 6 - [Undergraduate degrees](#)). The EC Panel comprises 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.
- 11.8. The panel has up to 20 working days to provide a response from the date of your receipt notification from the clerk.
- 11.9. 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.
- 11.10. 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.

- 11.11. 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.
- 11.12. 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.
- 11.13. 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.](#)
- 11.14. 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.](#)

## 12. Financial Implications

- 12.1. 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)).
- 12.2. For students funding their studies via Student Finance, OCA has a responsibility to report attendance to Student Finance in line with the [Active Study Policy](#).
  - 12.2.1. If you apply for and are successfully awarded a deferral (of any length), and are funded through Student Finance England, Wales, or Northern Ireland, a suspension of study will be confirmed for the duration of your deferral.
- 12.3. Other than where an exceptional case is agreed, there will be no reduction of fees where an extenuating circumstances application has been declined.

## 13. Extraordinary Circumstances

- 13.1. In certain circumstances the provisions covered in sections [10](#), [11](#), and [12](#) 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:

- 13.1.1. War.
  - 13.1.2. Civil unrest.
  - 13.1.3. Famine.
  - 13.1.4. Drought.
  - 13.1.5. Public Health Emergency, such as pandemics.
  - 13.1.6. Natural disasters.
  - 13.1.7. Strike or industrial disputes.
  - 13.1.8. Fire, flood, or storm.
  - 13.1.9. Compliance with any law or governmental order.
- 13.2. 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.
- 13.3. 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.
- 13.4. In addition, the normal requirement to make applications for extension or deferral at the time they occur is suspended.
- 13.5. 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.
- 13.6. 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 13.3.
- 13.7. 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.
- 13.8. 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.

- 13.9. 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.
- 13.10. 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.
- 13.11. If you have previously been rejected for an extension or deferral under normal operating rules you 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.

#### **14. Return to Study**

- 14.1. After a period of deferral (on undergraduate degrees) or interruption (on postgraduate degrees), OCA will engage with you to discuss your 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.
- 14.2. If you 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.
- 14.3. 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.
- 14.4. 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](#).
- 14.5. 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 4 - 8. Additional evidence may be required and will be considered on a case by case basis.

## 15. If you need support

- 15.1. 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.
- 15.2. Guidance notes on making applications are included in the separate application forms.

## 16. Linked and other policies and legislation

- 16.1. 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:
  - 16.1.1. Section C - 7 Period of Registration for Open University Awards delivered by Subsidiary Institution.
  - 16.1.2. Section C - 8.0 Interruption of Studies.
  - 16.1.3. Section F - Extenuating Circumstances.
- 16.2. 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](#).

## 17. Changes since previous policy

- 17.1. Transfer of policy to new policy template.
- 17.2. Amendments to wording for clarity and ease of reading.
- 17.3. Removal of section “Requesting and interruption between units” (Duplication).
- 17.4. Fee reductions in section 8 (Other Extenuating Circumstances) awarded by Head of Student Services rather than FEAR Committee.

## 18. Contact Us

- 18.1. OCA’s registered address is:

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