

Personal Circumstances Policy

Responsibility for Policy: Relevant to:	Registrar and Chief Operating Officer All LJMU Staff, Students and Academic Partnerships
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Responsibility for Document Review:	Head of Registry Services, Assistant Academic Registrars
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RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

List here any documents that relate to the creation of this policy

- Academic Framework
- Academic Appeals Guidance for Students

RELATED POLICIES & DOCUMENTS

Personal Circumstances Policy 2023/24

1. Introduction

The university defines the term “personal circumstances” to describe serious and exceptional factors outside a student’s control that adversely affected their performance during their study, and which are not already taken into account by an Individual Student Learning Plan (ISLP). These factors may, for example:

- Require an extension to a coursework deadline to allow a student to submit an assessment later than anticipated.
- Have caused a student to miss a coursework deadline or deadlines.
- Have prevented a student from attending an examination or other timed assessment (e.g. presentation or in-class test).
- Have severely impacted the ability of a student to finish a timed assessment (e.g. a student was taken ill during an examination or assessed presentation and was unable to complete the finish the assessment as a result).
- Require a student to withdraw their declaration that they were ‘fit to attempt’ an assessment when it becomes apparent that they were not in a fit state to make such a declaration.

2. Supportive processes for the consideration of personal circumstances

It is each student’s responsibility to undertake the required assessments for their programme of study on or by the dates set by the university. However, the university recognises that students may encounter personal difficulties or circumstances outside of their control that affect their ability to attempt or complete assessments. This policy provides details of the following processes designed to support students in those situations:

- Coursework extensions.
- Personal circumstances (non-attempt at assessment) applications, when circumstances have prevented the submission of coursework or attendance at an examination or assessed presentation.
- Personal circumstances (special mitigation) applications, when a student begins a time-limited form of assessment (such as a presentation or examination) but when the assessment could not be finished due to illness that occurred during the assessment.
- Personal circumstances (revocation of ‘fit to attempt’ declaration) applications, when a student declares that they have evidence that they were not in a fit state to decide whether they were ‘fit to attempt’ an assessment item.

2.1 Who is eligible to use the processes?

All undergraduate students, postgraduate taught students and apprentices, and postgraduate researchers taking taught modules as part of their programme, are eligible to use the processes described in this policy. This includes students studying at partner institutions.

2.2 Disposal of supporting evidence

All applications and evidence will be held securely and treated confidentially and will only be viewed by those directly involved in the decision-making process. Following the meeting of the Board of Examiners and the subsequent appeals period, the form and supporting evidence will be disposed of in line with the university’s Record Retention Schedule.

NOTE: the appeals period includes the opportunity for the student to submit to Stages 1 and 2 of the internal appeals process and to progress to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) following the completion of Stage 2. Students have up to one year from the completion of internal procedures

to submit their complaint to the OIA. Thus, applications and evidence will be subject to disposal only after the timeframe for application to the OIA has elapsed.

3. Extensions for coursework

3.1 Overview

Students are expected to plan their workload to avoid being impacted upon by a minor illness or other insignificant cause. However, a student may apply for an extension if a significant and serious event that prevents submission arises before the published submission deadline for an individual coursework item.

Points to note:

- As the work is submitted after the normal deadline, a student may receive their mark later than the rest of the cohort.
- It is not expected that a student would require repeated changes to deadlines.
- Repeated requests for extensions to deadlines would normally activate a detailed review of a disabled student's current support, or to consider whether a student who does not have reasonable adjustments in place requires them.
- It must be possible to provide parity for all students registered on a module. Granting an extension must not disadvantage other students, or unduly advantage the student who is applying for the extension.
- Due to the type and timing of some forms of assessment, it may not be possible for an extension to be given. Where the nature of the assessed work is such that an extension cannot be granted, and the student does not submit or undertake the assessed work, this is recorded in the Student Record System as a 'non-submission' and the student can use the 'non-attempt at assessment' procedure (see section 4, below).
- Any extension deadline must allow all processes, such as moderation and mark verification, to be completed prior to the Board Reporting Deadline (BRD).
- A student is permitted to submit the work earlier than the expiry date of the extension period if they wish.

3.2 The process for applying for a coursework extension

The extension request must normally be submitted before the deadline.

Applications for an extension should be made online via the My LJMU Portal. Students who are not able to apply using the online application form should contact the module leader as soon as possible. If an extension to a deadline is granted, the assessed work will be marked as if on time.

Work granted an approved extension must be submitted by the revised deadline date.

3.3 Late extension requests

Applications made after the coursework deadline will normally not be considered. Exceptionally, a late application may be considered where the student provides evidence to the module leader of a situation that demonstrates why they could not submit an extension request on or before the deadline for the submission of the coursework.

3.4 Requests that are not accepted

A student will be expected to submit their work by the original deadline if an application for an extension request is not accepted. However, a student may still be eligible to submit a separate 'non-attempt at assessment' application if they are unable to submit the work due to factors outside of the student's control (see section 3, below).

4. Personal circumstances (non-attempt at assessment)

4.1 Overview

A student may make a personal circumstances (non-attempt at assessment) application where serious and exceptional factors outside their control, which adversely affected their performance during their study and which are not already taken account by an Individual Student Learning Plan (ISLP), prevent them from attempting a summative assessment item, and where alternative actions are not possible or are inappropriate.

4.2 Final deadlines for the submission of applications

A personal circumstances (non-attempt at assessment) application should be made no later than five working days following the affected assessment event. However, if the student's situation prevents the submission of an application, this may be considered outside of this period (see 4.6 below).

4.3 Making decisions on applications

Personal circumstances (non-attempt at assessment) applications will be considered by a designated Personal Circumstances Panel (which may be convened at Faculty or School level), who may consult with academic colleagues before a decision is made.

If a student does not submit work for assessment and where a personal circumstances (non-attempt at assessment) application is accepted, the Board of Examiners will defer the student's module attempt until the next assessment opportunity.

Acceptance of a personal circumstances (non-attempt at assessment) application does not lead to any adjustment in a mark.

4.4 Notification of decisions

The decision to accept or reject a personal circumstances (non-attempt at assessment) application will be recorded on the Student Record system. Students will be notified of the outcome via email in a timely manner and any subsequent Board of Examiners action will be available on My LJMU following the publication of results.

If a student submits a personal circumstances (non-attempt at assessment) application that is approved by the Personal Circumstances Panel, but who then submits work for assessment by the advertised deadline, their non-attempt at assessment application will be deemed "Not Valid" by the Board of Examiners and the work will be marked.

4.5 Late applications

In exceptional circumstances, where a student can demonstrate, with the support of independent documentary evidence, that they could not reasonably have been expected to comply with the university's regulations owing to the specific nature of the issues involved, an application submitted beyond the above timeframe may be considered.

Where appropriate, if the late application is upheld after the relevant Board of Examiners has met, the Chair of the Board of Examiners will be notified, and the student's academic profile will be reconsidered.

5. Personal Circumstances (special mitigation)

5.1 Overview

A student may apply for personal circumstances (special mitigation) to have their mark for a timed assessment (such as an exam or presentation) removed if the student began the assessment but was taken ill during the event and was unable to complete the assessment as a result.

If a student leaves an exam or presentation due to illness, it is their responsibility to inform the responsible person/s so that the circumstances can be recorded for future reference.

In the case of a valid personal circumstances (special mitigation) application, the assessment item attempt is either: (i) declared null and void, deferred to the next appropriate opportunity and reported to the Board of Examiners or (ii) the module leader assigns a mark where there is sufficient evidence to do so and where this is approved by the Chair of the Board of Examiners.

6. Personal circumstances (revoking a 'fit to attempt' declaration)

6.1 Overview

Students who attempt a summative assessment task declare themselves 'fit to attempt' that assessment task and applications for the consideration of Personal Circumstances are not normally permitted for that assessment. However, in exceptional circumstances a student may apply to defer an assessment attempt when there is clear evidence that they were not in a fit state to decide whether they were fit to attempt the assessment.

7. Using the Personal Circumstances processes

Students are strongly advised to obtain guidance or advice from their personal tutor or a Student Wellbeing Advisor prior to submitting their application. Such advice will be limited to the procedures to be followed and the required evidence. The responsibility lies with the student to make the final decision as to whether or not to submit their application. Staff should not attempt to pre-judge the likely outcome of an application submitted under the process.

Applications should be made online via the My LJMU Portal. Students who are not able to apply using the online form (e.g. students studying at an academic partner) should contact their personal tutor or module leader as soon as possible to enquire about the local process for submitting an application.

It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the application is submitted and that all relevant information is made available to the Personal Circumstances Panel. A verbal notification regarding Personal Circumstances is not sufficient.

When filling out an application form, a students must ensure they record exactly which assessments have been affected and unambiguously link this to the modules they relate to. They must clearly state why the circumstances adversely affected their ability to attend or to submit the assessment, and the reasons given must be linked to the dates of the assessment.

All the following pieces of information are essential:

- personal details - name, student number, award title, module codes and module names.
- details of how the circumstances affected the student and relevant dates and details.
- independent, third-party documentary evidence.

Supporting statements from members of academic staff or appropriate professional services staff (e.g. a Student Wellbeing Advisor) may be provided for additional contextual information but not as a form of evidence. Where it is impractical for a student to provide independent, third-party documentary evidence, a Personal Circumstances Panel may take a statement from a relevant member of university staff as being indicative of the veracity of the circumstances disclosed by the student.

Electronic submission grants permission for the request for the consideration of personal circumstances to be considered and provides confirmation of the application submission date.

A student's application will not be carried forward between assessment opportunities, e.g. from semester 1 or 2 to the June/July reassessment period or from one year's assessment period to the next. A new application will need to be submitted which demonstrates that the circumstances are ongoing and affecting the student's ability to submit or attend subsequent assessments.

In extreme circumstances, the University reserves the right to defer any assessment item.

The John Moores Students' Union Advice Centre provides independent advice and assistance with applications for all students: <https://www.jmsu.co.uk/advice>

8. Appeals

A student may appeal against the outcome of a Personal Circumstances Panel if they can demonstrate:

- i. that there has been a material administrative error, or
- ii. some other material irregularity has occurred, or
- iii. that the decision of the Personal Circumstances Panel was unreasonable.

Disagreement with the decision of a Personal Circumstances Panel is not in itself grounds for appeal.

There are strict deadlines for the submission of an appeal. Students must lodge the appeal with the Student Governance Office within 10 working days of notification of the outcome of the Personal Circumstances Panel.

Guidance notes on the appeals process and appeals forms are available at <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/about-us/public-information/student-regulations/student-appeals>

Appeals forms are completed at <https://myservices.ljmu.ac.uk/>

If an appeal is upheld, the Personal Circumstances Panel may be required to reconvene to reconsider its decision. Where the decision(s) of the Personal Circumstances Panel is modified, the Board of Examiners may also be required to reconsider the student's profile in the light of any change(s) made by the Personal Circumstances Panel.