

Access to HE Extenuating Circumstances 2021-22

Extenuating Circumstances can be experienced by learners in any given year, whether in the midst of a pandemic or not. Centres must have appropriate procedures in place for dealing with extenuating circumstances cases. As stated in Grading Scheme Handbook Section E: Student Results and Awards Boards (December 2018) these procedures should be clear and available to all Access to HE Students. Procedures must include:

- A clear definition of extenuating circumstances
- Procedures that must be followed by student to notify Centres of extenuating circumstances that affect completion or submission of work for assessment.
- Procedures followed by Centres when they have been notified of extenuating circumstances affecting a student's assessed work
- Procedures relating to special needs and processes for reasonable adjustments.

However, the current situation regarding COVID-19 means Centres could continue to experience an increase in reported Extenuating Circumstances across 2021-22. Centres are to continue to apply their Extenuating Circumstances policy and procedures with regards to individual learner cases. For most, it will be a discussion regarding an extension to an assessment deadline. As always, records are to be kept, updated regularly, accessible and supported with appropriate evidence where possible. This should include recording attempts to contact a learner even if a response is not received.

Learners may feel that the outcome of their assessment has been impacted by the extenuating circumstances experienced. If this is the case, the learner could choose to appeal the outcome following the Centre's Appeal Policy and Procedure, with extenuating circumstances being the grounds for the appeal. If the extenuating circumstances are only reported after confirmation of the outcome of the assessment, then the learner may still appeal but the Centre will need to establish if there was an acceptable reason why the extenuating circumstances were not revealed before submission of assessment.

It is possible that a learner may report extenuating circumstances at the time of submission or during the marking of the assessment. In such situations, the Centre can apply their Extenuating Circumstances policy and consider if an extension is appropriate i.e. more time to work on the assessment. Again, there would need to be consideration as to whether there is an acceptable reason why the extenuating circumstances were not revealed before submission. If an extension is agreed, the learner cannot receive any feedback for the assessment submitted. This ensures that the learner is not unfairly advantaged.

It is possible that a whole group or cohort may be impacted by the same extenuating circumstances at the same time e.g. absence of staff for a significant period of time. The AVA will manage such instances with collaboration with the Centre. Therefore, it is imperative that the AVA is notified when such situations occur, and these are not held back until the end of the course. Such cases must be fully documented and include evidence.

Learners with extenuating circumstances may complete assessments after the internal moderation window for that particular unit. To ensure that learners are not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged, it is important to ensure that assessments from learners with extenuating circumstances are still internally moderated. Therefore, a second window of internal moderation may need to be scheduled to cater for this inclusion allowing for the internal moderation and feedback to other learners not to be disrupted.

Just as it is important for inclusion in internal moderation, assessments completed by learners with extenuating circumstances should also be included in the Curriculum Area Moderator's (CAM) sample. This follows the AVA's normal approach of ensuring that the sample selected by the CAM is representative. Assessment trackers / records will need to identify the learners with extenuating circumstances so that the CAM can easily select a sample of them. Samples will be representative of the grades achieved, number of units and number of assessors. Where learners with extenuating circumstances will complete assessments after the CAM has sampled the unit and produced a report, the CAM will include these learners in the next moderation.

Through communication with the assessor and or tutor, the Internal Moderator (IM) and Curriculum Area Moderator (CAM) will be provided with the available relevant evidence to consider whether the grade awarded in each case is fair and accurate. Such information can include background information relating to the extenuating circumstances, supporting information from the tutor or assessor, adaptation records and the learner's achievement profile to date. If the IM or CAM does not agree with the grade awarded, this must be recorded on the sample record and a justification provided. This will then be reported to the AVA for further analysis. The AVA will determine if there is to be any adjustment to the grade awarded.

Centres are to ensure that learners are aware of their Extenuating Circumstances Policy and how to apply should they need to.

Many Centres will have appropriate forms for learners to use to apply for extenuating circumstances. The AVA has produced one that Centres may use if they do not have one in place. There is also a form available to collate a summary of extenuating circumstances that may need to be presented to the Centre Reviewer in the meeting prior to the Final Award Board.

As always, the AVA is here to support all Centres and will continue to communicate any updates where necessary.

Key points:

- Centres to continue to apply their Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedure for individual learner cases
- Records and evidence to be collated and maintained
- AVA will manage whole group / cohort extenuating circumstances which need to be reported as soon as they occur
- Additional windows of internal moderation may be required to ensure inclusion of extenuating circumstances cases
- Assessment trackers / records to identify the learners with extenuating circumstances so that the CAMs can select a sample.