

Mitigation Policy for students undertaking an MA programme on-line

1.0 Introduction

1.1 As a student time management is an essential part of your studies, and you are responsible for planning your work effectively so that you are able to meet assessment deadlines. Occasionally minor illnesses or difficult circumstances occur but these are part of normal life and you should still be able to continue with your studies.

1.2 However, where prolonged illness or exceptional circumstances arise, the University operates a policy which recognises mitigating circumstances and takes appropriate action to ensure that your academic performance is not adversely affected by these circumstances.

1.3 The principles governing the mitigation process are that it should be:

- **Clear** – the claim form and process should be easily understood by all staff and students.
- **Timely** – any mitigation claim should be dealt with at the relevant assessment point.
- **Fair** – by dealing with claims under the same central system, decisions will be made by senior staff who are not directly concerned with you, and who are following guidance laid down in the mitigation policy. Annual reviews take place to ensure consistency of approach.
- **Confidential** – only staff who are directly involved in the process will have knowledge of any claim.

If you choose not to notify the University of mitigating circumstances at the point at which they affect assessment, it is highly unlikely that any retrospective allowance will be made through the appeal process.

1.4 It is important to understand that in considering your mitigating circumstances the University cannot make an academic judgement on the extent to which your performance in assessment has been affected. For this reason, if mitigation is agreed action will take the form of either, an extension or one of the actions as indicated in Section 6 of this Policy. It will not change any of your assessment marks.

1.5 If you have an ongoing condition, mitigation may not be the most appropriate means of support. You should make contact with your Student Adviser, (studentadvisers@studyonline.aub.ac.uk) for further discussion. Similarly circumstances that applied before you enrolled on the course would not be considered for mitigation. If however, there is a sudden change in your condition, treatment or circumstances that is affecting your ability to undertake assessment, you could be eligible and you should speak to your Student Adviser in the first instance.

- 1.6 **NB** Students are required to back up their work and therefore if you experience computer failure, this will only be considered for mitigation if it is evident that you have taken appropriate steps to protect your work and avoid computer problems.

2.0 APPLYING FOR MITIGATION

NB You are seeking mitigation for yourself and whilst staff will provide help and support, it is ultimately your responsibility to make a mitigation claim.

- 2.1 If you wish to claim mitigation you should contact the Programme Leader (or nominee) prior to the assessment deadline.
- 2.2 Any claim must be submitted **prior to the unit assessment** deadline with a fully completed mitigation form and backed by appropriate evidence.
- 2.3 **You should allow one week for the processing of your claim and the Mitigation Team will not meet emergency requests for quick approval.** If you submit your request close to the unit deadline, you are unlikely to receive the decision until after the original unit deadline.
- 2.4 Evidence provided to support your claim should be in the following formats: Word, PDF or jpeg.

3.0 Requests for extensions of up to four weeks on assessment deadlines

- 3.1 If you wish to apply for an extension, discussion must take place with the Programme Leader (or nominee) and a formal claim must be emailed to the Programme Leader prior to the assessment deadline, using the mitigation form and the production of appropriate evidence. **Your claim must be received prior to the assessment deadline.** You should allow at least one week for the approval process, (see para 2.3 above). Forms and evidence should only be presented in the following formats: Word, PDF or jpeg.
- 3.2 Please be aware that an extension should match approximately the number of days lost due to illness or other reason as indicated by the evidence provided.
- 3.3 The Programme Leader (or nominee) will review the form and supporting evidence. If fully satisfied with the claim, they should sign the form to signify their support and email to mitigation@aub.ac.uk
- 3.4 No claim will be accepted unless it has been correctly completed and evidence has been provided.
- 3.5 The Mitigation team will review the claim to ensure clarity of information, appropriateness of claim in terms of the evidence provided, and consistency with claims from students in other courses. Further clarification may be sought from the student as required.
- 3.6 Claims for extensions of four weeks or less will be submitted to the Director of the School in which your course is placed.
- 3.7 The Director will make decisions in the light of past practice and in line with the Mitigation Policy.

- 3.8 If an extension of more than 4 weeks is required, the expectation is that you should intermit your studies (take a break). If you still wish to apply for mitigation, your request will be considered by the relevant Director and a further member of the Mitigation Board or in their absence, the Director of a different School, but please note that only in very exceptional circumstances would such an extension be approved.
- 3.9 If you are seeking an extension which would take you beyond the deadline for consideration by the examination board, the implications of this will be discussed with you first and confirmed in any letter of approval.
- 3.10 A claim for mitigation should be made in agreement with the Programme Leader. If the Programme Leader does not support you in making a claim, you may present the completed form and evidence to the Mitigation Team (mitigation@aub.ac.uk); such claims will only be considered by a full meeting of the Mitigation Board. It should be noted that this would require an extraordinary meeting of the Board and is likely to extend the timeline in processing the claim.

4.0 Evidence for a mitigation claim

- 4.1 Evidence is needed to support any claim. Medical evidence must confirm a medical condition that is current and so a doctor's note that indicates you were seen after the illness occurred, and does not include a professional diagnosis, will not be accepted as evidence. A report from a professionally qualified counsellor or the University's Wellbeing/Disability Service will normally be required to support a claim of personal crisis.

Using evidence from a third party and data protection

- 4.2 It may be that it is the illness or crisis of a close relative that is impacting upon your performance. If this is the case it is important to show how the situation has affected you. If you do need to provide evidence giving personal details about a third person, you should ensure that you are using their information in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This means that you must ask permission from the person, explain to them how their information will be used (see Section 9.0 below) and ask them to sign a statement on the mitigation form.

5.0 Requests for action other than an extension

- 5.1 An extension of time in which to complete outstanding work will resolve the majority of claims under the mitigation process; however, circumstances may be such that an extension is not the most appropriate way to resolve the situation. Other types of action that could be requested are:
- 5.1.1 Where a student has produced sufficient work as a result of complete or partial fulfilment of a unit, a mark may be awarded taking into account the student's overall mark profile.
- 5.1.2 A reduction in the assessment load may be negotiated, which ensures that appropriate learning outcomes are still met.
- 5.1.3 If insufficient work exists to enable assessment to take place, evidence of learning by other means such as viva voce examination may be sought, for which a mark may be awarded.

5.1.4 In extremely severe cases, credit may be awarded without a corresponding mark. It should be noted that where no mark is given, this unit will not be taken into account within the final award calculation.

5.2 If a mitigation request is made seeking any of the above actions, it can only be considered by a full meeting of the Mitigation Board.

5.3 A formal claim must be emailed to the Programme Leader using the mitigation form and the production of appropriate evidence. This claim must be received prior to the deadline for the relevant Mitigation Board.

5.4 The Programme Leader will review the form and supporting evidence. If fully satisfied with the claim, they should sign the form to signify their support and email the form to mitigation@aub.ac.uk

5.5 The Mitigation Team will review the claim to ensure clarity of information, appropriateness of claim in terms of the evidence provided, and consistency with claims from students in other courses. Further clarification may be requested as required.

5.6 The Mitigation Board will consider the request and the student will be notified of the outcome. For the operation of the Mitigation Board, see Section 8 below.

6.0 Decisions under the mitigation process

6.1 When evaluating a mitigation claim, the following will be taken into consideration:

- The severity and the timing of the circumstances alleged.
- The appropriateness of the evidence provided.
- The extent to which the circumstances would have affected the assessment indicated in the claim.
- The extent of work affected by the mitigating circumstances and the implications of any extension of time or other requested action on the whole assessment portfolio.

6.2 In order to ensure parity of treatment for all students, decisions will always be made in the light of past practice with reference to similar claims.

6.3 The University has a duty of care for its students; the decision taken on a mitigation claim will ensure that a realistic timeframe is agreed which enable you to complete outstanding assessment requirements without undue pressure. Where there is clear evidence of mitigating circumstances that have been affecting you over a lengthy period of time, this may mean that you are recommended to intermit and complete studies in the following academic year.

7.0 Communication of the decision following a mitigation claim

7.1 On being notified of the decision on any claim, the Mitigation Team will email students informing them of the outcome with copies sent to the Programme Leader and Student Records.

8.0 Meeting of the Mitigation Board

8.1 Where needed a full meeting of the Mitigation Board chaired by the Academic Lead on Standards and Quality will be held prior to meetings of the Progression and Awards Board to consider any outstanding claims. In addition on an annual basis there will be:

- A review of the decisions made throughout the year to ensure consistency and parity of treatment; analysis will identify by School and course, reasons for claims (grouped under standard headings) and length of extension given; identification of any non-standard reasons for claim and length of extension given.

8.2 In the case of student appeal against an assessment decision: if a student makes an appeal on grounds of previously undisclosed mitigating circumstances (2.1.1 Appeals Policy), the Mitigation Board will be convened to consider the case for mitigation. This will ensure that the consideration of any claim is consistent with other mitigation claims received by the University throughout the year. For further information see the Appeals Policy for HE Taught Courses.

9.0 Accessing and maintaining records in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and monitoring the process.

9.1 The documentation and records associated with a mitigation claim will only be accessed by staff who are directly involved with the processing of the claim – see below:

9.2 A log of claims and decisions will be maintained within a folder on the Registry Server together with the original claim form. This log will be available through controlled access to Student Records and Academic Officers during the year for oversight of the process. The claim will only be seen by the Programme Leader (or nominee), member(s) of the Mitigation Board making a decision on the claim, and relevant Professional Service staff directly involved in the processing.

9.3 Copies of all the documentation will be retained within controlled access on the Registry server for two years after which it will be destroyed.

9.4 The operation of the process will be reviewed by the Mitigation Board on an annual basis. This review will include analysis of claims by ethnicity, gender and disability to ensure that the process meets equality and inclusivity requirements. This will be summary information which does not identify any individual student.

10.0 Contesting a decision made by the Mitigation Board (NB, if this forms part of an appeal against an assessment outcome, you should follow the University's appeals policy)

10.1 If you are not satisfied with the decision made, you are entitled to request that your claim is reviewed. You should make this request in writing to the University Secretary outlining the reasons for the request within 10 days of notification of the decision. The University Secretary will convene a meeting of the Mitigation Board or if the decision was made by the full Board, they will refer the matter to a senior independent member of the academic community for a full review of the documentation involved.

10.2 The decision will normally be made within 10 days of the receipt of the appeal. If you are still dissatisfied with the decision made, or the initial decision was made by the full Mitigation Board, you may appeal in writing to the Vice-Chancellor. The letter of

appeal must be lodged with the Vice-Chancellor's office within ten working days of the date of notification of the decision.

10.3 You may appeal on the following grounds:

10.3.1 That new substantive evidence has become available which is relevant to the case and has material impact such that the outcome may have been affected.

10.3.2 That due process was not followed and that this had a material bearing on the outcome of the case.

10.3.3 That the decision of the Mitigation Board was perverse, taking into account all the evidence presented.

10.4 The Vice-Chancellor and an independent member of academic community will conduct a full review of the documentation relating to the case, including all documentation considered by the panel and its decision. They will not normally meet with the parties concerned but may request a meeting with the Academic Lead on Standards and Quality (ALSQ), who chaired the Mitigation Board, to request clarification of any points raised by the student in their appeal, or to discuss the impact of any new evidence. The Vice-Chancellor will reach a judgement on the balance of the evidence, and will either:

- Confirm the original decision
- Uphold the appeal and require the Mitigation Board to reconsider its original decision.

10.5 The Vice-Chancellor will write to the student to confirm their decision. This will normally be within 10 working days of receipt of the letter of appeal although, as this authority cannot be delegated, there may be occasions where a longer time period is required, and in these cases the Vice-Chancellor's Office will contact the relevant parties to explain the circumstances.

All members of the University's community including staff, students, visitors and contractors have a responsibility to treat others fairly and respectfully regardless of the characteristics which may define their identity. These include the legally protected characteristics which are: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and Civil partnership, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion or belief (including lack of belief), Sex and Sexual orientation. The University has committed to provide a working and learning environment founded on dignity, respect and equity where discrimination of any kind is treated with the utmost seriousness.