Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedures For Undergraduate and Master’s Level Programmes

1.1. This Policy and Procedure is concerned with mitigating circumstances affecting academic performance in relation to examinations, major pieces of coursework and projects, and difficulties impacting upon a substantial part of the academic year.

1.2. Issues relating to minor pieces of coursework can be dealt with at the discretion of the Senior Tutor (for undergraduate programmes) or the Postgraduate Tutor/other designated member of staff (for Master’s level programmes).

2. Principles

2.1. The policy embodies the following principles:

- The extent of discretion which may be exercised by Boards of Examiners in relation to mitigating circumstances should be consistent throughout the College.

- Students presenting mitigating circumstances in mitigation of poor academic performance should receive a fair hearing.

- Procedures for consideration of mitigating circumstances should be consistent throughout College to ensure equity of treatment.

- Student confidentiality should be respected as far as possible.

- Decisions regarding what evidence is presented to a Board of Examiners should be made by more than one member of staff. The group making this decision is referred to as the Mitigation Advisory Panel (MAP).

- Procedures should be backed by adequate documentation, i.e. in their promotion to students, in confirmation of evidence and in the recording of decisions.

3. Extent of discretion

3.1. Boards of Examiners may use their discretion where mitigating circumstances are independently corroborated and are judged by the Mitigation Advisory Panel to be of sufficient severity to have substantially affected performance as follows:

- To allow candidates who miss an examination or major element of coursework an opportunity to sit/submit and receive an uncapped mark.
• To allow candidates to sit but who are considered by the Mitigation Advisory Panel to have performed significantly below their normal ability (based on prior performance) to re-sit the assessment and receive an uncapped mark or to complete an alternative SQT (the latter option may not be offered to any student on a programme where the external accrediting body demands that all graduates have met a minimum standard in all major assessments e.g. medical students).

• In exceptional circumstances, where the above options cannot be used without disadvantage to a student, the Board has the option to raise to a pass mark a candidate who has achieved marginally less (as defined by Senate) than the pass mark in order to allow them to progress.

• In the consideration of the award of degree classification/distinction where a student’s marks are close to a class/distinction boundary.

4. Procedures for the Implementation of Policy

4.1. The following procedures are based on current best practice and should be followed by all departments.

1. Students should be informed of welfare arrangements in their written induction material and should be specifically advised at induction meetings to inform the Senior Tutor/Personal Tutor (for undergraduate programmes) or the Postgraduate Tutor/other designated member of staff (for Master’s Level programmes) of any problems affecting their academic performance. Information about the welfare arrangements should also be clearly accessible from relevant departmental teaching websites.

2. The procedure for requesting mitigation, including details about the type of independent evidence required to support requests and the possible outcomes of successful requests for mitigation (section 2 above) should be made clear to students.

3. All students should be written to a few weeks before the examination inviting them to submit details of any problems affecting their academic performance to the Senior Tutor (for undergraduate programmes), or Postgraduate Tutor/other designated member of staff (for Master’s level programmes), in writing on the appropriate form (Appendix 1). They should also receive a final reminder when they are emailed with information about examination arrangements.

4. All requests for mitigation should be made on the relevant form (Appendix 1 for examinations and major pieces of coursework and projects and Appendix 2 for Missed or Late minor pieces of coursework) and accompanied by any independent corroborative evidence. This evidence and details of the outcome should be kept on the individual’s file.
5. Submissions by students should be considered prior to the meeting of the Board of Examiners by the Mitigation Advisory Panel consisting of a small group of key staff at least one of whom should be a member of the relevant Board of Examiners, which makes recommendations to the final Board. For undergraduate programmes the MAP would usually consist of the Head of Department, Senior Tutor, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Chair of Board and year coordinators, for Master’s Level programmes the MAP would usually consist of Head of Department, Programme Director, Chair of the Board, Director of Postgraduate Studies and Postgraduate Tutor. The Mitigation Advisory Panel will categorise the scope and extent of mitigation requests as SEVERE / MODERATE / SLIGHT or NONE. The Mitigation Advisory Panel will also determine the amount of information which may be released to the Board subject to the wishes of the student (see below). However, candidate numbers only will be used when recording and passing on decisions on individual candidates.

6. A simplified process should be adopted for students to report any mitigating circumstances resulting in missed or late coursework where the work makes only a minor contribution to the end of year mark or final award mark. Students should complete a standardised form to document the circumstances (Appendix 2). The amassing of several forms for an individual student should trigger an investigation by a Senior/ Personal Tutor (for undergraduate programmes) or Postgraduate Tutor/other designated member of staff (for Master’s level programmes) to establish whether further action should be taken. For further information on late submission see the document Penalties for the Late Submission of Assessed Work [add link].

Note: The College Health Centre can certify illness only for absence from College lasting more than one week or absence from an examination. They cannot certify an illness if the student has not been seen at the Health Centre during the illness. Likewise, the College Student Counselling Service can only provide a letter on request by a student who is already attending counselling. The College Disability Advisory Service can only help students to obtain appropriate evidence of disability prior to examinations taking place and are not able to certify for absences due to disability.

7. It is essential that Boards of Examiners minute both the recommendations on mitigation received from the Mitigation Advisory Panels and the justifications for any action taken in consideration of mitigating circumstances.

8. A written record of submissions by students and the outcomes recommended by Mitigation Advisory Panels should be kept with the examination records.

9. Students are normally required to submit requests for mitigation in accordance with the prescribed procedure. However, on exceptional occasions, Mitigation Advisory Panels may receive late submissions.
In such cases, students should be required to provide a written explanation for the late submission, for consideration by the Mitigation Advisory Panel, which will need to consider each request on its merits. Late submission for mitigation to the Mitigation Advisory Panel will only be accepted if it is clear that the evidence, for example, diagnosis of an illness, was not available earlier.

5. **Student confidentiality**

5.1. The more information that is revealed to the Mitigation Advisory Panel, the more able they will be to make an informed recommendation to the Board of Examiners. However, it is acknowledged that requests for mitigation may require a student to reveal information of a highly personal and sensitive nature. In order to balance these conflicting needs:

- It is expected that students will release sufficient details of their circumstances to the Mitigation Advisory Panel.

- Mitigation Advisory Panels should take all revealed information and corroborating evidence into account when making their recommendation to the Board of Examiners.

5.2. Mitigation Advisory Panels should report their recommendations and the nature of the evidence provided to Boards of Examiners. Where a student has requested the withholding of specific information, his or her wishes must be respected. For this reason, Mitigation Advisory Panels should always include one or more members of the Board of Examiners who will attend the Examiners' Progression and Award Board (EPAB) for undergraduate programmes or the Final Board of Examiners' Meeting (FBEM) for Master’s Level programmes. Candidate numbers only will be used when recording and passing on decisions on individual candidates.

6. **Aegrotat provision (undergraduate programmes only)**

6.1. The College Requirements for the award of the degrees of BSc, MSci, BEng and MEng provide for the award of an aegrotat degree and for the procedures for consideration of eligibility to be awarded such degrees. The proposals outlined above would apply where the award of an aegrotat degree would not be appropriate.

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Jan 2014
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<td><strong>Originator:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cross References:</strong></td>
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