



University of
St Andrews

Extenuating circumstances

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Key terms	Academic policies/Student progression
Purpose	This policy provides a clear definition of what the University considers to be extenuating circumstances and the sources of evidence required to substantiate claims affecting academic performance and engagement.

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
2.2	Minor changes to list of extenuating circumstances to include serious IT issues for online students.	updated	Academic Policy Officer (Digital & Student Experience)	July 2025

University of St Andrews
Policy on Extenuating Circumstances

1. Principles

- 1.1. The policy aims to establish a clear operational definition of what the University considers to be extenuating circumstances (in the context of requests for academic adjustments).
- 1.2. The policy will also define the types and sources of evidence required to substantiate claims of extenuating circumstances affecting academic performance and engagement.
- 1.3. The policy will outline the University's expectations on the presentation of extenuating circumstances and the roles and responsibilities of staff and students.
- 1.4. In the case of a request for academic adjustments, the policy aims to support students in managing the challenges and demands of academic study while ensuring that fairness and academic requirements are maintained.
- 1.5. Any requests for academic adjustments or evidence of extenuating circumstances may be shared with other relevant staff in the University.
- 1.6. This policy does not apply to any reasonable adjustments made to students on the grounds of a disability.

2. Definition

- 2.1. Extenuating Circumstances are defined as unforeseeable or unpreventable circumstances that are likely to have a material impact upon a student's academic performance and/or ability to engage with their studies.

3. Roles and Responsibilities of Staff and Students

- 3.1. It is the responsibility of the student to notify their School(s) as soon as reasonably possible in line with published procedures if there are any extenuating circumstances and, if requested, provide evidence (Appendix 1).

- 3.2.** The relevant staff member within each School will exercise discretion to determine what mitigation is appropriate when a student declares an extenuating circumstance.
- 3.3.** When an extenuating circumstance impacts a student for more than 5 working days or 10 non-consecutive days, the relevant staff member within each School will exercise discretion to determine whether further evidence of the extenuating circumstances is required.
- 3.4.** The relevant staff member will share any further evidence of extenuating circumstances with Student Services.
- 3.5.** If the staff member decides that further evidence of extenuating circumstances is required in support of a request for reasonable adjustments:
 - a)** The staff member will ask the student to contact Student Services to discuss the problems affecting their studies (See Appendix 1).
 - b)** Student Services will review relevant information from academic or professional staff and advise the student regarding any appropriate external evidence e.g. a medical letter.
 - c)** Student Services will submit the relevant statement to the School(s).

4. Self-Certification

- 4.1.** When a student experiences extenuating circumstances resulting in an inability to engage with classes or complete assignments, they must submit a self-certificate.

Self-Certificates are required if a student:

- a)** fails to attend an examination, or
 - b)** fails to engage with any part of the module or programme which is identified as compulsory in each School, or
 - c)** fails to submit a compulsory assessment on time, including an extended deadline or where a student has previously negotiated an extension.
- 4.2.** The completion of a self-certificate does not exempt a student from completing compulsory elements of a module (See Appendix 1). Having submitted a self-certificate, the student remains responsible for contacting the relevant staff member in each School to ascertain:
 - whether any remedial work or assessment is required
 - whether any evidence of extenuating circumstances is required.

5. Decisions on Requests for Academic Adjustments

- 5.1.** The relevant staff member in each School has the discretion to make the final decision as to whether appropriate academic adjustments will be offered. Within guidelines as per Appendixes below and [the Extension Guidance FAQ](#).
- 5.2.** Schools will not be bound to follow the decision of other Schools regarding any academic adjustments.
- 5.3.** The table in Appendix 2 refers to the types of circumstances which are likely or unlikely to be accepted as extenuating circumstances. The table is not exhaustive and should be used as guidance only.

6. Evidence

- 6.1.** If further evidence is required, the relevant staff member must make this request in writing to the student.
- 6.2.** All evidence must be in written English, and it is the student's responsibility to ensure an acceptable translation is supplied if necessary.
- 6.3.** Exceptionally, evidence for extenuating circumstances can be submitted by a third party where unforeseen medical circumstances have been identified which prevent the student from submitting the evidence.
- 6.4.** Where the student is required to obtain medical documentation from a local health care provider, they should request a medical report from the most appropriate medical professional who knows their case. The student may also wish to inform Student Services and submit their medical report to this service, making Advisers aware of any medical issue which may become prolonged and impact on further necessary and permissible academic adjustments. Where a student is unable to engage with the University, medical evidence can be provided by their emergency contact.

Any fee for the provision of evidence must be paid by the student. Students facing financial hardship should speak to the Money Advice Team for further information.

- 6.5.** The University reserves the right to make enquiries to establish the authenticity of the documentation. If documentation is found to have been falsified, students will be referred to non-academic misconduct.

- 6.6. Where a student has demonstrated sufficient reason for not providing evidence from a professional service or third party, the student's written account can be deemed appropriate as evidence.

7. Academic Adjustments

- 7.1. If the request for academic adjustments is approved, staff should refer to the [Guidance for Staff on Assessments](#) for information on academic adjustments.
- 7.2. In the case of incomplete module assessments and results due to student absences, the Module Board will consider cases subject to Section 5 of the [Policy on Student Absence](#).

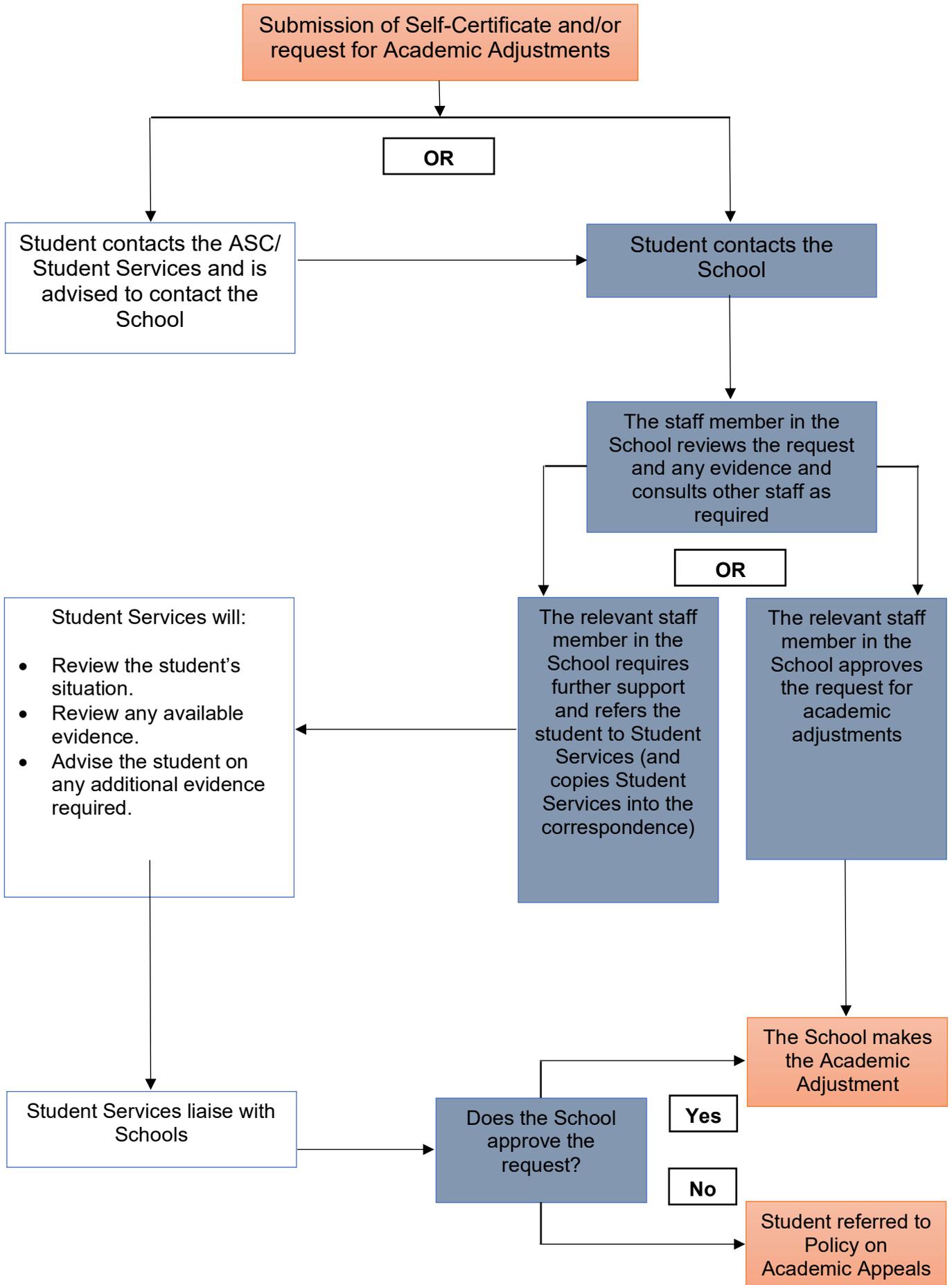
8. Alternative Adjustments and Appeals

- 8.1. In a case where a student rejects the option to accept the academic adjustments offered, they should be aware that the School may not be able to accommodate the extenuating circumstances at a later date.
- 8.2. Appeals of academic decisions including those made under the permissible grounds of extenuating circumstances are governed by the University policy on [Student Academic Appeals](#).

Appendix 1:

School

Student Services



Appendix 2:

Types of Issues	Circumstances <i>likely</i> to be accepted as Extenuating Circumstances	Circumstances <i>unlikely</i> to be accepted as Extenuating Circumstances
<p>Medical Condition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A chronic medical condition or disability which has recently worsened • Absence of appropriate disability support arrangements for measures beyond the student's control • Serious illness or accident • Short-term ill-health condition • Childbirth, or pregnancy complications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical circumstances which do not relate to the assessment period in question and/or cannot be attributed as having an impact on the assessment and/or examination • Medical circumstances where appropriate disability support arrangements are currently in place as determined by the Disability Team in Student Services. • Minor illness or ailment
<p>Personal/Family Circumstances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serious illness, accident, death or bereavement of immediate family or partner. This includes a person who is dependent upon the student for their care. • Significant adverse personal/family circumstances • Exceptional (i.e. non-routine) caring responsibilities • Unforeseeable financial issues • For students studying online, serious IT issues (loss of connection or network facilities, loss of computer data, geoblocking, etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreseeable financial issues • Holiday or family events • Poor time management or personal organisation (work pressure; conflicting assessment deadlines) • An inability or reluctance to disclose extenuating circumstances at the appropriate time. • Failure on the part of the student to recognise University regulations and assessment procedures. • IT Issues (network facilities, loss of computer data, printing problems etc) • Accidental submission of an incorrect assessment (e.g. coursework from another module) • Misreading of an examination timetable

<p>Exceptional/ Unforeseeable Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major transport incidents (e.g. transport routes to St Andrews being closed) • Military conflict • Natural disaster, extreme weather conditions (including but not limited to Met Office Weather Warnings, Flood Warnings, and so on) or global health crisis • Civil unrest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport difficulties (missed buses; traffic congestion).
<p>Legal Proceedings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal proceedings which require court attendance or jury service • Victim of criminal activity or harassment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal conviction
<p>Employment/Career Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant or immediate changes in workload or changes to work pattern normally available for study or assessment • Attendance at employment or internship opportunities pre-approved by the School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive travel time to attend interviews for work placement or employment.

Appendix 3:

Types of Issues	Evidence that is <i>likely</i> to be accepted:	Evidence that is <i>unlikely</i> to be accepted:
<p>Medical Condition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An independent assessment, report or letter of the student's medical condition by a General Practitioner, health professional or clinical specialist that clearly states the dates when the illness affected the patient. • Confirmation from the Disabilities Team that academic adjustments are appropriate but not yet in place, where the delay is not the responsibility of the student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An independent assessment, report or letter from medical services which does not address the student's medical condition. • Report of a medical assessment which did not take place at the time when the symptoms were present.
<p>Personal/Family Circumstances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A signed letter from a person with an appropriate professional standing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written account, assessment or character reference from a student's family or friends who have directly witnessed the circumstances that have affected the student's academic performance. • Written account from University staff who have not directly witnessed or cannot account for the case of extenuating circumstances, or the impact on the student's academic performance. • Evidence that refers to extenuating circumstances beyond common issues or difficulties (e.g. common cold etc.)
<p>Exceptional/ Unforeseeable Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of a major transportation incident or confirmation from a transport company. 	

Legal Proceedings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official documentation relevant to the application which may include legal documents, police reports, insurance claim or medical report etc. 	
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written account by an independent third party who directly witnessed the circumstances (e.g. employer; notary). Evidence showing that an interview for work placement or employment cannot be rearranged. 	

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
2	Senate approved amendments regarding circumstances and evidence required, including removing requirement for medical evidence for short extensions	updated	Administrative officer	May 2024
2.1	Formatting change	updated	Administrative officer	June 2024
2.2	Minor changes to list of extenuating circumstances to include serious IT issues for online students.	updated	Academic Policy Officer (Digital & Student Experience)	July 2025