



MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES POLICY

This policy only applies to QA Higher Apprenticeships in England



1. Introduction

This policy covers only Level 7 Higher Apprenticeships authored and delivered by QA. It does not cover any programme validated through a partner university (such as degree apprenticeships) or any other type of provision delivered by QA.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure decisions made related to mitigating circumstances are clear, fair, evidence-based, timely, proportional to the circumstances and applied consistently.

2. Definitions

Mitigating circumstances are factors which have a detrimental effect on a learner's ability to successfully complete their assessment(s).

A learner may apply for mitigating circumstances in order:

- i. to support a request for an extension to a submission deadline, or to defer assessment.
- ii. to explain cases where the learner's academic performance falls below expectations.
- iii. to explain absence from an examination.

Mitigating circumstances must be:

- iv. significant, meaning that they should have a clearly detrimental effect on the learner's academic work; and
- v. relevant, meaning that they must relate directly to the timing of the workshop, assessment or deadline in question; and
- vi. outside a learner's control, meaning that the effect could not be avoided, counteracted or reduced by the student taking reasonable steps in preparation or in response.

Mitigating circumstances cannot be applied for under the following condition:

- vii. The learner has entered EPA Gateway and is no longer bound by the regulations of QA Higher Apprenticeships, such as where the EPA Assessment Plan requires learners to cease contact with QA after entering Gateway.

3. Extensions

- i. The maximum time permitted for an extension will normally be two weeks from the submission date.
- ii. Applications for an extension should be received no less than two working days before the assessment deadline.

- iii. Annual Leave booked by a learner that falls within the extension period will not be considered or added onto the extension period.
- iv. Annual leave that was booked during term time does not qualify as mitigating circumstances for an extension. The only exception to this is where a learner can evidence that their annual leave was booked before the date they enrolled on their course.
- v. Applications received after the assessment submission deadline has passed may be considered if there are valid grounds for the application to have been submitted late. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis and on the evidence provided.
- vi. A learner who has been granted an extension may still submit at the normal time and can submit at any time in the extension period. Markers will not usually commence marking until the extension period has lapsed.

4. Deferrals

- i. An application for a deferral will normally mean the deadline for the assessment is moved to the next submission point at the end of the following term.
- ii. A deferral will only be granted if the circumstances and evidence are judged to be sufficient and an extension to the deadline is deemed inappropriate.
- iii. Applications for a deferral should be received no less than two working days before the assessment deadline.
- iv. Learners cannot defer their final module of study unless the grounds and evidence are so significant there are no suitable alternatives. This is to ensure timely entry to EPA Gateway and to avoid an unnecessary extension to the length of programme.
- v. A learner who has been granted a deferral may still submit at the normal time at which point the deferral will be cancelled.

5. Consideration of mitigating circumstances

- i. Applications are usually considered by members of staff who are not directly involved in the delivery or assessment of the programme the applicant is studying. Application and evidence are reviewed by senior academics or support staff deemed to have sufficient experience and knowledge of the policy and evidence requirements.
- ii. Decisions are made based on the evidence and application statement - no consideration will be given to any prior knowledge of the applicant or previous circumstances that staff are aware of. Learners are advised to discuss their circumstances and the potential impact of their application on their academic progress and standing with their skills coach or programme leader.
- iii. To protect confidentiality and privacy, only staff that process applications are permitted to view application forms. The circumstances must not be shared

- with anyone outside of those involved in the decision-making process. Outcomes (usually only approvals) will be shared with the marking team, Skills Coach and may be shared with employers.
- iv. Where the circumstances are considered by the applicant to be confidential and they do not wish to disclose them on the application form, they are entitled to discuss the matter with the Safeguarding Team who can act as advocate on their behalf. Written confirmation from the Safeguarding Team is required in these circumstances. This also applies in circumstances where the applicant is receiving ongoing support from a member of the Safeguarding Team.
 - v. Staff processing applications are authorised to automatically reject applications if there is no evidence submitted or if additional information requested on behalf of the panel is not submitted in a timely fashion.
 - vi. The panel has the right to request additional evidence or further clarification from the applicant. Applicants are encouraged to submit further evidence as quickly as possible to avoid delays in processing the application and may risk a late submission penalty if they do not complete the process prior to the assessment deadline.
 - vii. If the panel finds that the circumstances and evidence provided are of such a nature that further support is necessary, they may refer the applicant to additional support services, such as Safeguarding or Learner Support.

6. Evidence Requirements

- i. All applications must be supported by documentary evidence. Various forms of evidence can be accepted as supporting documentation for an application. Further information on acceptable evidence is available to learners on their VLE.
- ii. Where possible evidence should be from an official body, such as a doctor or hospital, particularly in cases of long-term illness.
- iii. If there are work-related issues that have disrupted a learner's ability to work effectively on their assessment, this can only be evidenced through written confirmation by their employer. This can be in the form of an email sent directly to the application inbox but must state the what the issue was, how it impacted the learner and the time period affected. Staff will exercise their judgement on whether the evidence provided supports the need for an extension or deferral.
- iv. In some cases documentary evidence after submission of the application may be accepted where the applicant can reasonably demonstrate that the evidence could not be provided at the time of application.
- v. Where the application states the death of a close friend or relative, discretion may be used as to the appropriate type of evidence to be considered. Staff processing applications of this nature should seek advice from the Senior Academic Services Manager before requesting additional evidence from the applicant.

7. Policy Review

- The next review of this policy will take place during June 2024.

Revision History			
Version	Issue Date	Author	Description of Change
1.0	08/10/2021	Brett Cuming	New policy implemented
2.0	02/06/2023	Brett Cuming	Reformatted to new policy template. Removed references to QA Higher Education Removed references to Welfare Team and changed to Safeguarding Team Clarified rules relating to extensions and annual leave
3.0	10/6/2024	Julie Marshall	Updated reference from panel to appropriate QA staff