

Document Title	Personal Mitigating Circumstances
Policy Area	Area 7: Supports for Learners
Document Code (version #)	QAP7-3 (V3.0)
Applies to	<input type="checkbox"/> All <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Specific (QQI programmes and SQT accredited programmes involving assessment)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Learners only <input type="checkbox"/> Staff and Learners

Document Owner	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs
Approved by	Academic Council

Approval date	15 th November 2024
Effective date	18 th November 2024

Related legislation, policies, procedures, guidelines and local protocols	<p>This policy has been designed with due regard to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), QQI - Sector Specific Independent/Private Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), QQI - Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 - Assessment and Standards (2022 - Revised), QQI - Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers (2013), QQI - Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023), Quality and Qualifications Ireland
--	--

Table of Contents

1. Purpose	3
2. Scope/Application	3
3. Definitions	3
4. Responsibility	3
5. Policy	3
5.1. Maintaining Confidentiality of Verification Documentation	5
5.2. Principles for Considering & Managing Applications for Personal Mitigating Circumstances ..	5
6. Procedure for Applying for Compassionate Consideration	5
7. Policy Monitoring	7
8. Document Control	8

1. PURPOSE

This document sets out SQT's regulations governing personal mitigating circumstances and the procedure for submission of personal mitigating circumstances.

2. SCOPE/APPLICATION

This document is specific to QQI accredited programmes and SQT's own approved programmes, which are assessed internally.

Policies and procedures relating to personal mitigating circumstances for other awarding bodies are addressed by the awarding body in question and information is available through the Accreditation Manager.

3. DEFINITIONS

- **Personal Mitigating Circumstances** are defined as those unexpected / unplanned situations which arise that impact on an individual's ability to fulfil certain obligations or impacts on their performance.

4. RESPONSIBILITY

The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs is responsible for implementing this policy, with the support of the Accreditation Manager and in consultation with the relevant Programme Director and/or Tutors.

5. POLICY

Personal mitigating circumstances also referred to as extenuating circumstances, are considered to be exceptional conditions that temporarily prevent a learner from completing an assessment activity or that would seriously impair a learner's performance in an assessment. This policy supports the implementation of SQT's regulatory obligation to have policy and procedures in place to support the assessment of learners. In doing so, the policy supports the principle of fairness set out in [QAP6-1: Assessment of Learners](#). In line with best practice and guidelines, this policy ensures that extenuating circumstances are considered fairly, with clear criteria for evidence and timelines for submission. The determination of extenuating circumstances will follow the principles of equity and transparency, considering both on-site and the online learning environments. For learners engaging in blended and fully online programmes, additional considerations are included for disruptions specific to digital environments. These may include verified connectivity issues, problems accessing essential digital resources, or extended power outages affecting the learner's ability to engage in assessments. Examples of circumstances under which SQT may consider giving compassionate consideration to the learner and verifiable acceptable evidence is presented in Table 1 below.

Circumstance	Details	Examples of Verifiable Evidence
Medical Reasons	Absence due to illness or injury, where the learner's ability to complete assessments has been significantly impacted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A medical certificate or letter from a doctor or healthcare professional covering the period leading up to the assessment or submission deadline. - Hospital discharge papers or documentation from a healthcare provider outlining the nature of the illness/injury and its impact on the learner.
Physical Injury or Emotional Trauma	A significant physical injury or emotional trauma occurring within a substantial period (typically four to six weeks) before the assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A medical certificate or letter from a doctor, physiotherapist, or counsellor. - Documentation from a relevant health professional or emergency service report.
Chronic Conditions	Long-term illnesses such as epilepsy or other incapacitating conditions that affect the learner's ability to meet deadlines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A medical report or letter from a healthcare professional detailing the chronic condition and its effects on the learner's studies.
Bereavement	The recent death of a close family member or friend, typically within the past six months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obituary notice
Terminal Illness of a Close Family Member	The terminal illness of a close family member, affecting the learner's ability to focus on or complete assessments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A letter from a doctor or healthcare provider confirming the family member's condition.
Other Personal Mitigating Circumstances	Any other significant challenges not covered in the categories above that may have affected the learner's academic performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documentation from a relevant professional outlining the issue.
Online Disruptions	Significant technical issues, such as sustained internet outages or problems accessing essential course platforms or submission portals, that prevent the learner from completing assessments on time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A letter or report from the learner's internet service provider confirming the outage and its duration. - Screenshots or emails from technical support teams (e.g., platform provider) verifying the issue.
Digital Access Issues	Lack of access to necessary digital tools or platforms required for participation in online learning or assessments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evidence of communication with SQT or technical helpdesks regarding the issue. - A letter from a third-party (e.g., employer or institution) verifying lack of access to the required tools or platforms.

Table 1: Examples of Verifiable Acceptable Evidence

5.1. MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY OF VERIFICATION DOCUMENTATION

All information and documentation submitted in support of an application for personal mitigating circumstances will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. SQT is committed to handling sensitive personal data in accordance with our Data Protection Policy and GDPR regulations. Only relevant staff involved in the decision-making process will have access to the information provided and it will be used solely for the purpose of assessing the learner's application.

5.2. PRINCIPLES FOR CONSIDERING & MANAGING APPLICATIONS FOR PERSONAL MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

1. **Fairness:** Learners are entitled to undertake assessments in a fair and equitable context, with conditions that are comparable to those of their peers. If unforeseen circumstances arise that negatively impact a learner's performance, they have the right to request consideration regarding the submission and evaluation of the affected assessment task.

No learner can be considered to have successfully passed a programme unless the core learning outcomes have been achieved. When it is determined that a learner's performance has been adversely affected by personal mitigating circumstances, SQT may offer a repeat assessment attempt without penalty. In such cases, the repeat attempt will be treated as if it were the original assessment attempt, ensuring fairness in grading.

2. **Learner Responsibility:** Learners are responsible for -
 - Providing original, verifiable evidence to support their application for personal mitigating circumstances.
 - Making reasonable use of SQT's policies, procedures, and support services (e.g., applying for reasonable accommodations) to minimise the impact of personal circumstances on their studies.
3. **Fit to Submit:** Learners who proceed with an assessment without making use of SQT's available policies, procedures and support services are generally understood to have deemed themselves fit to undertake the assessment. By doing so learners affirm their readiness to complete the assessment task.
4. **Avoiding Unfair Advantage:** When applying for personal mitigating circumstances, learners must not seek to gain an unfair advantage over their peers. Learners are expected to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes and the application for personal mitigating circumstances must not be used to evade or circumvent the requirements of the assessment.

6. PROCEDURE FOR APPLYING FOR COMPASSIONATE CONSIDERATION

1. Learners should contact the Accreditation Manager no later than **two calendar weeks** before the assessment deadline unless other mitigating circumstances apply. The Accreditation Manager requests that learners complete a Personal Mitigating Circumstances Form (F23). The form must be accompanied by original, verifiable evidence as referenced in Table 1 above.
2. At least one member of the programme team and the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs or nominee considers the severity of the circumstances, the nature and weighting of the assessment activity and the quality of past achievement of the learner (where appropriate) in making the decision to grant an extension. In some cases a support meeting (or call) is required. The purpose of this meeting is to gather further details about the learner's situation and discuss the feasibility of the requested extension. The learner may be asked for further evidence, if necessary.

The decision may include:

- **No action** (if circumstances are deemed insufficient),
- **An extension or deferral** of the assessment deadline,

- **A repeat attempt** at the assessment without penalty, or
 - **Other appropriate accommodations** based on the individual case.
3. Learners will be notified of the decision in writing of the decision and any further actions required within 5 working days.
 4. Learners who wish to appeal must do so within 5 working days of being notified of the decision. The policy and procedure for **Academic Appeals (QAP7-6)** is implemented at this stage.
 5. All personal information and documentation provided in the application process is handled with strict confidentiality, following SQT's Data Protection Policy and GDPR regulations. Only those involved in the decision-making process will have access to the information provided.

7. POLICY MONITORING

Responsibility	Frequency	Methods
Director of Quality and Academic Affairs – Document Update	Per QA audit schedule	- Review of documentation as set out in QAP2-1: Ongoing Review and Update of QA Documents.
Programme Board	Each meeting	- Summary of personal mitigating circumstances applications per programme

8. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version No	Approval Date	Description of Revision	Originator	Approved By
2.0	1/3/19	New document format	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs	Academic Council
3.0	15/11/24	Updated Policy and Procedure Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examples of Verifiable Evidence: Clear guidance on the types of documentation required to support applications for extenuating circumstances. - Mitigating Circumstances Specific to Online Learning: Consideration of technical issues and lack of access to digital tools as valid extenuating circumstances, with appropriate forms of verification. - Inclusion of Section 5.1 (Principles): A new section outlining the core principles of fairness, transparency, and equity in managing extenuating circumstances. - Inclusion of Section 5.2 (Confidentiality): A dedicated section to ensure all personal data and documentation are handled in strict confidence, in line with GDPR and SQT's Data Protection Policy. - More Detailed Procedure: The procedure has been expanded to include clearer examples of acceptable evidence and a formalised process for support meetings. 	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs	Academic Council