Learning Advisory Committee

Guide to Mitigating Circumstances under the Heriot-Watt University Assessment and Progression System (HAPS)

The following paper is intended to provide guidance on dealing with mitigating circumstances under HAPS. A common approach across the University will ensure equality of treatment for all students who submit mitigating circumstances.

The following guidelines focus on mitigating circumstances in the context of assessment opportunities and recording of grades and apply to all forms of assessment.

Applications for the consideration of Mitigating Circumstances

Student applying for Mitigating Circumstances should use the online student self-service forms where possible; but applications in other formats should be considered where circumstances have prevented use of the online forms.

In normal circumstances, applications should be accompanied with submitted evidence of mitigating circumstances, for example a medical certificate. Students should be notified that signatures of authentication on any submitted evidence must be legible. However note that during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic this requirement may not be possible to fulfil.

Mitigating Circumstances and Assessment Opportunities

The following guidelines apply with regard to all assessment and re-assessment opportunities for students who have their mitigating circumstances approved by the appropriate MC Committee:

1. No assessment has been undertaken

   Students who have not been able to undertake any part of the assessment do not forfeit an assessment opportunity by having an approved mitigating circumstance. Such students should be advised to undertake the assessment at the next suitable examinations diet, which would be regarded as the student's first attempt.

   Alternatively, the Board of Examiners may decide to award an appropriate grade (see below), even though no part of the assessment has been completed. In such cases, this will be recorded as the first assessment opportunity. Students will, however, be offered the opportunity to be re-assessed, if he or she wishes to try to obtain a higher grade. In this case, the attempt will be recorded as the second assessment opportunity.

2. Part or all of the assessment has been undertaken

   In the case of students who have completed a part or all of the assessment and have an approved mitigating circumstance, the Board of Examiners should take this into account in determining an appropriate grade (see below). This will be regarded as the student's first opportunity. The student should, however, be offered the opportunity to take a re-assessment, if he or she wishes to try to obtain a higher grade. In this case, the attempt will be recorded as the second assessment opportunity.
Mitigating Circumstances and Recording of Grades

There are two options available to the Board of Examiners with regard to the recording of grades for students who have presented mitigating circumstances. The following guidelines will apply:

1. The Board of Examiners may decide that there is sufficient evidence, which could be based, for example, on coursework already completed or performance in other linked courses, to merit the award of a grade. In such cases, the Board of Examiners can award as follows:
   - A grade in the range of A-D for courses which are prerequisites or requiring a minimum of Grade D,
   - A grade in the range of A-E for courses which are neither pre-requisites nor designated as requiring a minimum of Grade D as outlined within Regulation 3, para 16. In both cases justification for so doing must be recorded.

   The Board of Examiners must also be satisfied that, if the course in question is a pre-requisite, the student has demonstrated the capacity to be successful in the next course in the sequence.

   In this instance, the results letter will record the decision in the form of the grade awarded by the Board of Examiners, but the student will be offered the opportunity to take a re-assessment, if he or she wishes to try to obtain a higher grade.

2. If the Board of Examiners decides that a grade cannot be awarded, particularly in cases where the student has not completed any part of the assessment, a decision of MC should be recorded against the course(s) after the first examination diet. The student should then be advised to take the assessment, as a first opportunity, at the next suitable diet and a grade will be awarded accordingly.

   For example, for students starting in September, the first examination diet would be in the summer, and the second opportunity would be available in the autumn. In this instance, the initial results issued online in the summer will record MC against the first opportunity of the course(s) and the results issued online after the autumn diet will record whatever grade is awarded by the Board of Examiners.

Mitigating Circumstances and the Board of Examiners

The appropriate MC Committee for the student’s programme of study is responsible for making decisions on whether to accept an MC, and what mitigation to recommend to the Board of Examiners, based on the evidence of mitigating circumstances. That is, it is not the Course Board, Progression Board or Award Board that makes decisions on whether to accept an MC. The MC Committee has the authority to judge the adequacy and accuracy of all mitigating circumstances presented for consideration.
Summary

The two courses of action in relation to assessment opportunities and decisions (grades) may be illustrated as follows:

1. **No Assessment**
   - MC = no decision
   - 1st Assessment Opportunity

2. **Part or All of Assessment**
   - Other Evidence
   - Grade
   - 2nd Assessment Opportunity (optional)

3. **Other Evidence**
   - Grade
   - 2nd Assessment Opportunity (optional)