

A08.4 Serious Adverse Circumstances

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1 Introduction

1.1 Policy Statement

SAE Institute recognises that there may be significant factors which can have an adverse effect on students' performance in assessments. Claims for serious adverse circumstances are managed and considered in accordance with the A08 Assessment Policy, and in alignment with the regulations of the University partner for any programme.

1.2 Aims and Purpose

This policy is designed to support students whose learning has been adversely affected by serious adverse circumstances and its aims are to:

- Ensure fair treatment of all students when considering their adverse circumstances and determining how best to support them.
- Make clear the types of adverse factors that SAE Institute shall consider as serious adverse circumstances.
- Create a culture of enhancement seeking to learn from serious adverse circumstances and improve the student experience including through appropriate training for decision makers.
- Ensure clarity in language and process.
- Uphold fairness, consistency and natural justice in the treatment of the student body as a whole, as well as for particular individuals including by:
 - ensuring decisions are taken by those without conflicts of interest
 - ensuring that students are fairly assessed as a result of the process.
- Maintain awareness through collaboration with support services (academic and welfare), targeted local campaigns, and visible and accessible central information highlighted to students at relevant key points in the academic year.

1.3 Related Policies and Documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- A05 Academic Quality Assurance Policy
- A08 Assessment Policy
- A14 Complaints Policy
- A16 Student Support Policy
- A16.2 Equality, Inclusion & Diversity Policy
- Student and Programme Handbooks.

1.4 Definition

Serious adverse circumstances are significant circumstances beyond a student's control that would have affected their ability to perform to their full potential if they were to sit or submit an assessment at the appointed time. An application for serious adverse circumstances will only be considered if the circumstances meet the following criteria:

- The circumstances are exceptional.
- They are outside of the control of the student.
- Original supporting documentary evidence is provided.

2 Context

All undergraduate and postgraduate students have a responsibility to manage their learning during their registration at SAE Institute and may be required to complete and submit, or sit, a wide range of assessments. However, SAE Institute recognises that occasionally a student may, due to exceptional circumstances beyond their control, require an extension to or deferral of assessment. Such circumstances can be due to medical reasons or illness, or may extend to other exceptional circumstances that impede the student's ability to engage with their studies and complete assigned activities or place them at a disadvantage to their peers, including assessment.

It is expected that such exceptional circumstances, by their nature, would not have been known to the student prior to the commencement of their studies. In some cases, a student may require additional time to complete assessed work, and this will be part of their agreed adjustments put in place prior to commencement on the programme. However, in many cases students with appropriate support in place ought not to require routine extensions to deadlines. Those students may still need an extension where there is evidence of a breakdown in support, or an acute episode or worsening of their condition which means that the adjustments in place are not sufficient. In those circumstances, consideration should be given to any secondary effects that such an extension might have on the student's general workload.

In the first instance, students should always make the effort to consult with their Lecturer or Programme Coordinator at the earliest opportunity where there may be any exceptional circumstances that are likely to impact their studies.

Depending on the programme to which the student is registered, a short term (1-5 working days) extension may be granted at the discretion of the Module Leader, without the need for an application for serious adverse circumstances.

This policy is not intended for students who have a disability or an ongoing medical condition. If a student has a disability or ongoing medical condition, the student should speak with their Academic Coordinator and Student Support Officer to ensure that a Support Plan is developed and put in place for regular support (for further detail see A16 Student Support Policy). However, a student with a declared disability may need to request a deferral or extension if, for example, they experience an acute episode or worsening of their condition which means that the reasonable adjustments in place are no longer sufficient.

A student cannot appeal the decision of a serious adverse circumstances panel on whether or not to accept a claim for SAC. If a student is unhappy with the outcome, they are advised to follow the procedure outlined under A14 Complaints Policy.

3 General Principles

- All students should have a fair opportunity to show they can meet the required standards and be assessed on equal terms.
- All work submitted by students for assessment shall be graded on its merits without consideration of any serious adverse circumstances known to the marker. SACs will not be used by Assessment Boards to alter the grades of students.
- Students must submit applications for serious adverse circumstances with documentary evidence, at least twenty-four hours before the deadline for submission of the assessment in question. SAC applications submitted after this point will normally be considered only if the student was unable or, for valid reasons, unwilling, to disclose them before the deadline and submits documentary evidence to support this.

- Serious adverse circumstances will be considered by the Assessment panel, who will make a decision based on the published guidance. The outcomes of the application will be communicated to the student in writing.
- If serious adverse circumstances are agreed, the possible outcomes may include additional support for the assessment, an agreed extension to a coursework deadline, or deferral of assessment to the next opportunity. Details of the SAC will be kept confidential by the staff involved in the decision, while outcomes will be considered by the Regional Assessment Panel, to support its decisionmaking:
 - In considering whether a student may progress to the next stage of the programme.
 - In determining the classification for a qualification where the student is borderline or there are conflicting classifications in the profiles of grades.
- Normally serious adverse circumstances shall not be taken into account where the circumstances have already been allowed for (for example, through pre-existing Support Plans). Special assessment arrangements in cases of known disability should be discussed with the Academic Coordinator and subject lecturer and agreed with the student before an assessment period begins.
- Disclosure of information will be restricted to those parties involved in the consideration and administration of SAC claims. Where particularly sensitive, the student can request that details are only disclosed to the Chair of the Assessment panel and the External Examiner. There are circumstances where SAE's commitment to confidentiality is overridden by other considerations. These are:
 - When a student's health and safety, or that of others, is considered to be at risk.
 - When a student is considered to be at serious risk of abuse or exploitation.
 - When disclosure is required by law.
 - When a student's current behaviour or health requirements compromise SAE's responsibilities to outside agencies, including practice placements and partner institutions.
 - When a student's current behaviour or health requirements compromise SAE's responsibilities to other students to the extent that those other students are being adversely affected to the serious detriment of their academic progress.

Students who submit an assignment deem themselves to be sufficiently able to be assessed and cannot later claim to have suffered from serious adverse circumstances. The only exceptions to this may be:

- o Where, at the time of submission, the student was not capable of understanding that their performance was likely to be affected seriously by ill health and/or its treatment, and the student can provide written evidence from a health practitioner to support this; or,
- o Where a student suddenly becomes unwell during an exam or in-class assessed activity and elects to leave without completing the exam/activity. In these circumstances, the student must notify the assessor of the serious adverse circumstances which have necessitated their leaving.

Any retrospective claims made in this manner must be made via an appeal to the Dean.

4 Student Responsibility

It is each student's personal responsibility to undertake the required assessment for their programme of study at the required time. Failure to make a submission or attempt at a required assessment will result in that assessment being regarded as a "non-submission" attempt, earning the lowest mark on the relevant grading scale, **unless**:

1. these procedures are followed **and**
2. the evidence to support the claim of serious adverse circumstances is accepted by the assessment panel.

It is a student's responsibility to provide formal notification in writing at the earliest opportunity, detailing any circumstances which may affect their ability to meet their programme commitments (including assignment deadlines).

Students may seek advice from staff, but such advice should be limited to the procedures to be followed and the required evidence. It must place the onus clearly on the student to make the final decision. Staff should also avoid attempting to judge the likely outcome of a claim submitted under this procedure.

5 Ongoing Conditions or Specific Differences

Students who have a disability or ongoing medical condition may declare this to SAE at any point either prior to admission or during their studies. Students who have made such declarations will be provided with a support plan, as discussed further in the A16.2 Equality, Inclusion & Diversity Policy.

Once the declaration has been made and a support plan established, these issues are not covered by the serious adverse circumstances policy. Students seeking deadline extensions or other support under the provision of their support plan are not subject to the conditions herein. However, fluctuations in a student’s condition or any unexpected issues that have arisen for the student around their disability-related support are included.

6 Policy History

Policy Created:	July 2022
Date of Last Revision:	July 2022
Approved by:	CM, September 2022

Appendix A: Examples of Serious Adverse Circumstances

A.1 Table of Valid Circumstances and Evidence Required

Listed below are examples that SAE and the University partner would normally regard as serious adverse circumstances that could have seriously affected performance and/or attendance. This list is not exhaustive and where the University deems that a student's application falls within the above definition, it shall be treated under this policy.

Normally acceptable	Suggested sources of evidence	Notes
Illness (More than 7 days), accident or severe trauma or an unexpected deterioration in an ongoing illness or chronic medical condition	Medical certification of illness or serious accident of the student. It is recognised that it can be difficult to get timely verification from hospitals, but you should submit your claim, pending receipt of evidence.	Evidence to show that reason occurs at the time of an assessment. Certification must be current, and not produced retrospectively.
An unpredictable deterioration in an ongoing illness or an unexpected issue impacting on completion of assessments because of a disability or health condition	Learning Support Form (LSF) detailing significant fluctuations are expected as part of the ongoing condition/illness. Medical certification or independent verification	Where relevant statements are included in the LSF University Disability and Mental Health Advisors should be consulted as appropriate.
Recent death (< 3 month) of someone close	Death certificate (See point 4. for long term bereavement)	"Close" can refer to parents (and guardians), grandparents, children and siblings, a spouse/partner and it may include other family members, in-laws, grandparents and grandchildren.
Serious levels of prolonged trauma, stress or anxiety	Medical certification	Could be caused by long term effects of bereavement or diagnosed conditions.
Unforeseen accident/Serious illness of a close relative	Medical certification	Could include sudden deterioration of an ongoing illness.
A significant change to the condition or circumstance of someone for whom the student has a caring responsibility	Relevant medical certification or evidence from social services	Illness or other event that precipitates more care required by the student just before or on the deadline/exam.

Serious personal disruption	Independent verification such as supporting third-party evidence	Fire, burglary, requirement to appear in Court etc. relevant to the date of the assessment event or the period leading up to it. Travel problems are not normally accepted as students are expected to plan ahead.
Significant change of employment circumstances.	Employer letter providing evidence	(NB: This is not normally valid for full-time students)
Evidence of a declared disability that is provided too late to be taken into account in the deadline for assessment.	Corroboration from a Disability or Mental health Advisor	If there is a delay to assessment and/or diagnosis of a disability due to no fault of the student.
Religious Observance impact on scheduled examinations	A letter from a religious leader explaining the nature of the obligation and the way in which it impacts on the student.	Arrangements will only be made for religious days of obligations where it is prohibited to partake in examination activity.
A life changing situation has caused mass disruption, stress or delay to studying, for example, pregnancy and/or giving birth	Confirmation of the birth, i.e. birth certificate	Giving birth, illness and/or complications during pregnancy or unforeseen caring responsibilities may be considered with supporting evidence. Interruption of studies may be considered.

A.2 Table of Invalid Extenuating Circumstances and Evidence Required

The following is a non-exhaustive list of circumstances unlikely to be regarded as falling within the relevant definition and is unlikely to be accepted as extenuating circumstances.

NOT normally acceptable	Examples
Alleged medical conditions (lasting more than 7 days) without supporting evidence.	Claims will not be accepted without appropriate medical evidence.
Alleged medical conditions (lasting more than 7 days) without contemporaneous evidence or sufficiently detailed subsequent evidence.	If a student does not consult a medical practitioner at the time of the illness (lasting more than 7 days), it is not acceptable for a student to obtain generic corroborative medical statements at a later date. A letter from a medical practitioner stating, for example, "the

	student informs me that he/she was unwell during...." will not be deemed acceptable supporting evidence.
Social activities.	Hectic social life, parties, visits by/to friends, sporting fixtures.
Temporary self-induced conditions.	Hangovers, drug taking (unless possibly for a registered medical user influenced by the medical treatment involved including prescribed medication for certain conditions where it is known that there may be adverse reactions eg. drowsiness.)
Minor ailments and other conditions.	Coughs, colds, sore throats, sprains (other than in the writing hand/arm). Accidents/illness affecting relatives or friends unless serious or the student is the sole carer.
Examination stress.	Examination stress or stress in practice placement will not, by itself, be considered as an extenuating circumstance.
Complaints	Open or ongoing complaints about SAE staff which impact upon assessment (e.g. supervision).
Domestic or personal disruptions which could have been anticipated or planned.	Moving house, holidays, weddings or other events where the student either has control over the date or may choose not to participate. Change of job or "normal" job pressure (exceptional crises at work might be acceptable), financial issues, routine or minor transport or travel arrangements (e.g. traffic jams, foreseeable interruptions to services), illness of pets, oversleeping, misreading examinations timetable or other assessment details, poor time management.
Study-related.	Computer difficulties, losing work not backed up on computer disk or cloud services, submission of work to the incorrect site – or submission of incorrect work to the correct site, deadline congestion, examination congestion, missing books, examination rescheduling, late distribution of materials by the Faculty/School, delays in printing, photocopying and/or binding of assessed work.
Examination conditions.	Disruption in the examination room: poor lighting, excessive noise, illness or behavior of other students, noise from invigilators. Normally such conditions will have been reported by the invigilators, who will pass reports on to the Faculty.

Appendix B: Procedure for Application for Serious Adverse Circumstances (University of Hertfordshire awards)

The process and mechanisms by which students can apply for SAC will vary between regions and campuses; SAE teams are advised to refer to local guidance on implementation of the process.

1. Applications for SAC must be received at least five working days before the Campus Assessment Panel for the teaching period in question.
2. Applications for SAC cannot be accepted if the student has already made submission for the assessment in question.
3. The Campus Assessment Panel will consider all applications for SAC and make recommendations on their outcomes, to be brought to the Regional Assessment Panel.
4. The Regional Assessment Panel will confirm the outcome of all applications. Following the RAP, students must be informed in writing of the outcome of their application, and provided with all necessary details regarding their referred or deferred submission.
5. All students with approved SAC will be noted on the board report for the Content Specialist Panels, chaired by the University. The CSP paperwork must also include as attachments the formal decision made by SAE, plus evidence relating to the case, for review by UH as required.