



Briefing Document - Draft Additional Considerations for Assessment Policy

Academic Council meeting 23rd October 2024 (*This document should be read in conjunction with the proposed policy.*)

The University has a responsibility to all students and is committed to ensuring mechanisms are in place to support students through the challenges they may encounter throughout their programme of study. Two key policies aimed at supporting students are Extenuating Circumstances and Late Submission of Coursework. These policies have undergone only minor updates since 2009 and the limitations of both have been acknowledged by the university community.

In response, a Working Group was established by the Registrar and sponsored by ACCE to develop a new more comprehensive and equitable policy for the University. This briefing document provides an overview of the background work and consultation process led by the Working Group and outlines the key aspects of the proposed new Additional Considerations for Assessment Policy.

Background

Known Challenges with Existing Policies: In consultation with UCD Student Union, Access and Lifelong Learning, and University Governing Boards, several key challenges with the existing policies were identified:

- Scope: Limited inclusion criteria, leaving multiple gaps.
- Diverse Student Cohorts: Complex lives and varied contexts, such as Clinical and Professional Placements.
- Devolved and Divergent Practices: A history of decentralised and inconsistent practices across the university.
- Inconsistencies: Significant variations in processes, timelines, communication, supporting evidence, completion plans, and the use of IX/WN.
- Stakeholder Responsibilities: Unclear and inconsistent roles and responsibilities among stakeholders.

Recognising these limitations in addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, the new proposed policy aims to better align with the evolving educational landscape and student diversity across our student community.

The Working Group's objectives included:

- Reviewing data from UCD and peer institutions to inform a more supportive policy.
- Evaluating the policy's relationship with other institutional policies and recommending new ones if needed.
- Developing guiding principles, fair and timely policy procedures with clear stakeholder responsibilities.
- Conducting a university-wide consultation on the proposed changes.
- Assessing the potential placement of the policy under the UPB's oversight.
- Outlining strategies for effective implementation of the new policy and procedures.

Compositions and Operations of the Working Group

1. Who Was Involved in the Working Group?

The Extenuating Circumstances Working Group consisted of 20 members representing a wide range of stakeholders across the university, including all six colleges, support units, student advisors, UCD Health Services, UCD Access and Lifelong Learning, UCD Student Union, and faculty. In line with UCD's commitment to inclusivity, the group reflected the diversity of the student body, including Undergraduate, Graduate, Professional, Clinical, Continuous Professional Development, Access and Lifelong Learning, Erasmus, and International Exchange students.

Name	College	Role
Aideen Quilty (Chair)	Social Sciences & Law	Associate Professor Gender Studies and Social Justice
Tara McMorrow	Science	Associate Professor and Associate Dean of Science
Jonathan McNulty	Health & Agri Sciences	College T&L VP - School of Medicine
Jaime Jones	Arts & Humanities	Associate Professor School T&L - Music
Emma Sokell	Science	Professor - Head of School Physics
Christopher Jepsen	Social Sciences & Law	Professor of Economics
Liam Thornton	Social Sciences & Law	Associate Professor of Law
Aoife Doherty	Business	Director, Quinn School of Business Office
Shelly Smith	Engineering	Programme Manager - Programme Office
Jacintha Valley	Social Sciences & Law	Programme Manager - Programme Office
Oran O'Rua	Engineering	School/Operations Manager - School of EEE
Martha Ní Riada	Student Union	SU president
Sarah McGrath	Student Union	UCDSU Education Officer
Lisa Padden	ALL	Programme Manager
Eamonn McHugh	Academic Affairs	Student Adviser Graduate Research Students

Kieran Moloney	Academic Affairs	Student Adviser - College of Social Sciences
Lynn Foster	Academic Affairs	Student Engagement Manager
Hanna Laitinen	Academic Affairs	Strategic Projects Officer

2. How Did We Work?

Desk-based Research: The Working Group began its work in June 2023 with extensive desk-based research, reviewing policies from comparator universities both nationally and internationally to provide insight and guidance on approaches to developing a new policy for UCD. Our approach was iterative, continually revisiting existing practices and engaging with key stakeholders to address challenges in the current policy, including limited inclusion criteria, decentralised practices, and inconsistencies across the university.

Combining Extenuating Circumstances and Late Submission of Coursework policies- In line with the Working Group's Terms of Reference: *'Consider the relationship between the policy and other relevant institutional policies including (e.g., Late Submission of Coursework). Articulate, as appropriate, recommendations for additional policies which may arise from the findings of the working group.'* This issue was thoroughly discussed. The group reached a consensus that consolidating the Extenuating Circumstances and Late Submission of Coursework policies was both a necessary and logical step forward.

Proposed Key Changes - What Are the Key Changes Proposed?

Change of policy title - "Additional Consideration for Assessment Policy" - Given the substantial changes included in the proposed policy, and the historic and significant attachments to the existing policies across the university, it was deemed necessary to introduce a new policy title. This title signifies a clear departure from the previous policies. Based on research conducted on other universities and discussions within the Working Group, the proposed new title is "Additional Consideration for Assessment Policy", which will replace the existing Extenuating Circumstances and Late Submission of Coursework policies.

Additional Considerations - The new Additional Considerations for Assessment policy presents three distinct pathways aimed at supporting students; 1) Self-Declare for Extension, 2) Certified Additional Considerations and 3) Retrospective Applications.

Note: The key summary points for each are contained below. These should be read in conjunction with the proposed policy.

1. Self Declare for Extension

- All university students are expected to meet the academic requirements of their chosen programmes by established deadlines. If challenges arise that necessitate additional time, they may utilise the Self-Declare for Extension option, which allows them to avail of an extension of up to 5 working days before the submission deadline, without penalty, independent evidence, or academic approval. Coursework submitted after this extension will not be accepted unless a request for Certified Additional Considerations has been submitted. Students may directly apply for Certified Additional Considerations if the issue is expected to extend beyond 5 days.
- Penalty: A Module Coordinator may grant an additional 5-day extension with a penalty, resulting in a grade reduction for coursework submitted during this period. This will apply only to major assessment components.
- Caps: There is no restriction on the number of Self-Declare for Extensions a student may avail of; however, Module Coordinators may establish limits for particular modules or assessment components. Any such limits must be explicitly outlined in the module descriptor. Students should be cognisant that frequently availing of Self-Declare for Extensions may adversely affect their progression within their programme.
- Inclusions/Exclusions: The Self-Declare for Extension applies only to written assignments and coursework, as specified in the policy. The inclusion of specific assessments is determined by the Module Coordinator and outlined in the module descriptor. Other assessment types may be added at the Module Coordinator's discretion.

2. Certified Additional Considerations

Where a student cannot be accommodated via the self-declare for extension option students may make an application for Certified Additional Considerations supported by documentation. The Working Group recognised the need to expand the inclusion categories to ensure comprehensive representation of all students. These categories are guided by best practices from comparator universities and aim to address the complexities of students' lives while promoting consistency and transparency across the University. The five new inclusion categories are summarised as follows:

- Significant Life Events
- Logistics
- Health and Wellbeing
- Caring Responsibilities
- Bereavement

3. Retrospective Applications

In exceptional circumstances, it may not be possible to meet the Certified Additional Considerations application submission deadlines. Governing Boards should consider retrospective Certified Additional Considerations applications submitted through the online system. These will be limited to instances where there are valid reasons for non-submission within the usual timeframe. Retrospective applications will not be considered as part of the Self-Declare for Extensions process.

What form did the consultation take?

The Working Group conducted a thorough consultation process with a diverse group of stakeholders across the university, as summarised in the table below. The consultation process was carried out in multiple phases. It began with meetings to discuss the policy's direction with the Working Group and Senior University leaders. The second phase involved input from Associate Deans, Teaching and Learning Vice Principals and staff, the Directors of the College Office, the Directors of the School Office, and the University Programmes Board. The third phase included broader circulation to all Governing Boards and Schools. The fourth phase involved additional targeted consultation following the Academic Council meeting on 30th April 2024.

At the April 2024 Academic Council meeting, a productive discussion took place regarding the new proposed policy document. A number of points were identified for further consultation as detailed in the Academic Council minutes. The Working Group successfully collaborated with relevant stakeholders to address these points resulting in this revised policy document (Academic Council 23rd October 2024) - key revisions are identified in red in the proposed policy document.

Feedback was provided in various formats, including verbal and written responses, as well as input at individual, group, and programme levels. All feedback was carefully evaluated by the Working Group, and the policy was revised as appropriate to reflect these insights and responses.

Below is the list of stakeholders who participated - several stakeholders listed below were involved in multiple phases of the consultation process.

Consultation Phase 1	Consultation Phase 3
Registrar, Vice-President for Academic Affairs	All University Governing Boards
Dean of Undergraduate Studies	All Heads of School and School Managers
Dean of Graduate Studies	Graduate Research Board
Dean of Students	Professional Programmes
Consultation Phase 2	Unified Support Model Remote Working Group
Director and Faculty Teaching & Learning Unit	'Critical Friends' and Working Group spheres of influence
Associate Deans' Forum	SIPTU
University Teaching and Learning Committee	IFUT
DCOs and DSOs (Director College Office & Director School Office)	Consultation Phase 4
University Programmes Board (UPB)	Targeted consultation based on Academic Council minute
Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE)	

Next Steps

Subject to approval, the estimated timeline for implementing the new policy is the academic year 2025-26. To facilitate this implementation, four proposed work packages will be developed and delivered in 2024-25:

1. System Infrastructure Build: Extensive consultations will be held with all stakeholders to ensure that the needs of academics, administrators, and students are met. Additionally, rigorous testing will be conducted to establish thorough procedures for identifying and resolving real-time user issues efficiently.
2. Empirical Data: A comprehensive review of all applications, student trends, and outcomes will be undertaken to ensure effective oversight of the new policy. Key performance indicators (KPIs) will be established to monitor and evaluate progress over the initial three years.
3. Additional Guidance: This will include multi-disciplinary case examples created by UCD colleagues from various colleges, aimed at clarifying key elements of the policy.
4. Tailored Communication Plan: A customised communication strategy will be developed for each of the three key stakeholder groups: Students, Faculty, and Administrative/Support Staff.

It is recognised that the development and execution of these work packages may reveal areas requiring further clarification. Relevant University Committees will receive updates throughout 2024/25 on the progress of these four work packages.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Review:

A thorough, data-driven evaluation of the policy implementation will take place over the first three years and will be reported to the appropriate University Committees. This evidence-based review will establish necessary checks and balances, tracking applications, student trends (such as completion and fail rates), student engagement with online systems and outcomes from the certified Additional Considerations process.

Recommendations to Academic Council

- It is recommended that a formal decision on the institutional ownership of this policy be taken in the academic year 2024/25.
 - It is recommended that a formal decision on the institutional business ownership be taken in the academic year 2024/25, as they will assume responsibility for the implementation of the policy and the associated work packages.
 - It is recommended that the current Extenuating Circumstances policy and the Late Submission of Coursework policy be rescinded, subject to the approval of the Additional Considerations for Assessment policy.
 - It is recommended to revise the current Academic Regulations as appropriate to ensure resits (i.e. that IX grades can be applied to resit attempts) will be included under the new Additional Considerations for Assessment policy.
 - It is recommended that all faculty and staff engage with current and future diversity training including new developments relating to neurodiversity that incorporate disability within an inclusive framework.
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