



University of
St Andrews

Flexible deadlines and extension requests

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Flexible deadlines and extension requests: supporting disabled students

What are flexible deadlines?

- The University recognises that the effects of long-term physical health, sensory, cognitive, or mental health conditions may present obstacles to meeting assignment deadlines. Students who have long-term conditions (long-term is 12 months or more, or likely to last 12 months or longer) should consult with the Disability Team to discuss support options. '**Flexible Deadlines**' may be recommended in their support plan as a reasonable adjustment. Reasonable adjustments may also include assistive technologies, exam adaptations and alternative assessments, among others.
- For instance, where a student has a disability characterised by unpredictable acute episodes, providing flexible assignment deadlines and opportunities to catch up on academic work can reduce pressure and remove disadvantages. Where flexible deadlines are recommended in a support plan, Schools/Departments are expected to consider requests for extensions without the need for a *detailed* explanation to justify the adjustment (see Appendix 1). However, students should be clear in their explanation that extended time is required due to their disability.

How do flexible deadlines impact the granting of extensions?

- When flexible deadlines are authorised on a student's support plan by Student Services, students must still submit an extension request for each assignment requiring an adjustment, following the School's/Department's procedure prior to the assessment deadline.
- While the inclusion of flexible deadlines in the support plan removes the requirement for a comprehensive explanation regarding the need for an extension (see Appendix 1 for guidance), a student should still mention the reason for an extension when providing further detail of the need for mitigation. It is not sufficient to just state "I have flexible deadlines". If the request is not related to a student's disability, then it might be more appropriate to request an extension under the extenuating circumstances policy, should the situation merit this.
- The request for an extension must be submitted in advance of the deadline; however, there may be exceptional occasions where a disabled student would be unable to do this. For example, a student with epilepsy who has a seizure the night before their deadline, or a student with generalised anxiety disorder who either has an acute flare up (e.g. sleep issues or a panic attack) the night before and/or has an issue with their medication and this prevents them from communicating their needs in line with the School's/Department's procedures.
- The duration of an extension is determined by the School/Department. A School/Department decides the length of an extension by considering the reason for the request and the length of extension requested, the type of assessment, the assessment lead time, the weighting of the assessment, the knock-on impact an extension will have on other assignments in that module and any timeline for returning feedback to students.
- It should be noted that disabled students are generally aware of how much additional time they would need to complete an assignment, and this should be considered when determining the extension length e.g. a student who has cystic fibrosis requiring in-patient hospital care may need an extension commensurate with the time spent in hospital.

- However, there are occasions where the student's disability may make it challenging for them to estimate how long it will take them to complete something. For example, a student with ADHD/Autism/a mental health condition may find it challenging to estimate how long they need to complete a task, due to executive dysfunction challenges. A further extension could be guided by the School/Department (e.g. a student initially asks for 5 days, but doesn't meet this, the School/Department could give them 3 further days). In these exceptional circumstances, the student should ask for further extension before the extended deadline.
- For repeated requests for flexibility or when an extension goes beyond what the School/Department typically allows, the School/Department may wish to seek further guidance on what is reasonable from the Disability Adviser in Student Services. An example would be an extension surpassing 2 weeks.
- Every extension request is considered independently from previously approved requests.
- An extension granted by one School does not obligate other Schools to provide a corresponding extension.

When may extensions not be granted for students who have flexible deadlines as part of their support plan?

- Where meeting the deadline is a genuine competence standard e.g. lab work submission that is cumulative or completing a professional skills competency task.
- Where an assignment holds significant importance in the overall educational experience of students in the class (e.g. collaborative group work, group fieldwork, or participation in discussion boards) an alternative assignment can be considered in exceptional cases. In some Schools/Departments if one student in a group receives an extension the whole group get it by default.
- Retrospective requests for flexible deadlines are not normally granted unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g. a hospital admission, urgent medical appointment, acute period of physical or mental ill health impacting on the ability to follow procedure). In these cases, it is recommended that the School/Department contact the Disability Team for further details.

What factors will be considered when deciding on the length of an extension?

- The length of extension granted should be given in relation to the weighting and complexity of the submission for the module. As an example, for an assignment with a one-week submission date, a one-day extension might be considered appropriate.
- If a student requests a lengthier extension than is otherwise recommended by the School/Department or in cases where an extension of more than 2 weeks is requested the School/Department are advised to contact the student to ask about their progress with the assignment and their wellbeing, before agreeing on a lengthier extension. In such circumstances, the School/Department may contact the student's Disability Adviser in Student Services to assess the correct reasonable adjustment for the student. In some cases,

a deferral may be more appropriate. Deferrals require the permission of a School/Department. Consideration should be given to whether it would be better for the student to submit what they have already done, rather than continuing to offer additional lengthier extensions.

What mitigations can be put in place for group work?

Group work can be a challenging area due to the impact on other individuals. These are some suggestions, and further discussions with the Disability team may be helpful.

- If an extension is approved for an individual student who is part of a working-group submitting a common piece of coursework, an extension should be given to all working-group members. In such cases, consideration must be given to the impact of an extension on the other working-group members' workload.
- Where this is not possible, an alternative assessment for the student who requires mitigating circumstances should be assigned.

When should Schools/Departments liaise on an extension decision?

- In complex cases multiple Schools/Departments may wish to liaise together with Student Services about an extension decision. If it is challenging to agree on an extension decision with the input of Disability Services, they should contact the Associate Deans/Provost (Students) to help find a resolution (this may lead to an exceptional extension adjustment or a deferral).

Contact with Disability Services

- The Disability team provide guidance on using the reasonable adjustments recommended in student support plans and during the semester students (who have declared a disability to the University) are emailed to request that they check their support plans prior to the examination diet. This is also a 'touch point' for them to raise any queries or concerns about other aspects of their support plan.
- Students can request appointments with the Disability team using the Student Services enquiry form.

Flexible Deadline Scenario Guidance

Appendix 1

Guidance for managing extension requests where there is registered or declared disability

A student has declared a disability and registered with the Disability team and there are other Extenuating Circumstances.

Situation: The student has asked for an extension.
They have a support plan that recommends flexible deadlines.
There are other Extenuating Circumstances (ECs) too.

What should the student do?

- Follow the School's extension request procedure.
- Indicate that they have a support plan with flexible deadlines due to a disability. See the white boxes below for some guidance about additional information to provide.
- Note the ECs too.

What can the School/Department consider?

- The nature and gravity of the disclosed personal circumstances (ECs). Please note that should the School/Department require help or support in this decision from Student Services, they should reach out to them directly.
- The nature of the assessment and the preparation time.
- Self-certification and medical evidence where relevant (for ECs of longer than 5 working days, not for the registered disability).
- The knock-on implications for subsequent assessment deadlines on the module, and on other modules that the student is taking in the School/Department, when feedback is due to be given to all other students, and when overall assignment performance is due to be discussed in class.

Diagnosed condition: A student has declared a disability and registered with the Disability team.

Where flexible deadlines are recommended in a support plan, Schools/Departments are expected to consider requests for extensions without the need for detailed explanation/evidence to justify the adjustment. However, students should be clear in their explanation that extended time is required due to their disability.

Situation: The student has asked for an extension.
They have a support plan on MMS that recommends flexible deadlines.

**Please note some disabled students will have support plans that don't include flexible deadlines. An individual may still ask for an extension due to the impact of their disability. For example, a student with well-controlled & managed diabetes falls ill with a cold/sickness bug and this impacts their blood sugars, and they need some flexibility with submitting an assignment.*

See below for examples of how a particular condition may mean that a student needs to request some flexibility with a deadline and what information a student can provide.

This guidance is intended to help staff and students navigate the extension request procedure:

A diagnosed mental health condition such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder

In a similar way to underlying physical health conditions, mental health conditions can be prone to flare-ups, or individuals can experience sleep disturbances, medication changes, or increased fatigue. This can impact day-to-day activities and a student's ability to work through an assignment in a timely manner.

What should the student do?

- Follow the School's/Department's extension request procedure, and indicate they have flexible deadlines in their support plan.
- Confirm the ongoing difficulties they are facing (e.g. "the impact of long-term mental health condition, I am unable to work for more than X amount of time"; it would be unfair to ask for further details as the reasoning is unlikely to change), mention what stage they are currently at with the piece of work (e.g. written X no. of words), and an indication of the length of the extension they anticipate they will need.

What can the School/Department consider?

- The nature of the assessment and the preparation time
- The knock-on implications for subsequent assessment deadlines on the module, and on other modules that the student is taking in the School/Department, when feedback is due to be given to all other students, and when overall assignment performance is due to be discussed in class.

Social Communication/ASD/Autism/Specific learning difficulties (SpLD) such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D

In some cases, longer extensions are required due to difficulties accessing learning materials- this could be to do with reading speed, information processing, concentration and/or time management difficulties.

For example, even if all teaching and learning materials are accessible and the student is using assistive technology, a student may still require an extension so that they can finish an assignment because their working process is lengthier than a non-disabled student.

What should the student do?

- Request an extension using the School's/Department's procedure.
- The reason for the extension is unlikely to change, and it is not necessary to continuously ask the student to provide details. Instead, they can use a phrase such as "due to my documented condition and the impact on my learning I need to request an extension".
- Mention what stage they are currently at with the piece of work (e.g. written X no. of words), and an indication of the length of the extension they anticipate they will need.

What can the School/Department consider?

- The nature of the assessment and the preparation time
- The knock-on implications for subsequent assessment deadlines on the module, and on other modules that the student is taking in the

School/Department, when feedback is due to be given to all other students, and when overall assignment performance is due to be discussed in class.

A long-standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy.

From time to time a student could experience a flare-up that may require hospital admissions or regular medical appointments.
They could also experience changes to medications/treatment which will impact on day-to-day activities.

What should the student do?

- Follow the School's/Department's extension request procedure, and indicate they have flexible deadlines in their support plan.
- Briefly describe the difficulties they are facing (e.g. a phrase such as 'I am experiencing a flare-up of long-term chronic health condition'), mention what stage they currently are at with the piece of work (e.g. wrote X no. of words), and an indication of the length of the extension they anticipate they will need.

What can the School/Department consider?

- The nature of the assessment and the preparation time.
- The knock-on implications for subsequent assessment deadlines on the module, and on other modules that the student is taking in the School/Department, when feedback is due to be given to all other students, and when overall assignment performance is due to be discussed in class.

A physical/mobility issue or a sensory issue e.g. deaf, serious hearing impairment, a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses.

In some cases, long extensions are required due to difficulties accessing learning materials.

Even if all teaching and learning materials are accessible, a student may still require unusually long extensions (compared to non-disabled students and some disabled students).

For example, for a visually impaired student, the time taken to read all materials may be a very long process.

What should the student do?

- Request an extension using the School's/Department's procedure.
- The reason for the extension is unlikely to change, and it is not necessary to continuously ask the student to provide details. Instead, they can use a phrase such as "due to my documented condition and the impact on my learning, I need to request an extension".
- Mention what stage they are currently at with the piece of work (e.g. written X no. of words), and an indication of the length of the extension they anticipate they will need.

What can the School/Department consider?

- The nature of the assessment and the preparation time.
- The knock-on implications for subsequent assessment deadlines on the module, and on other modules that the student is taking in the School/Department, when feedback is due to be given to all other students, and when overall assignment performance is due to be discussed in class.

Situation: A short-term condition that may turn into a long-term* disability.

**'Long-term' means 12 months or more. For example, a breathing condition that develops because of a lung infection, or an individual that has anxiety symptoms for more than 12 months and it becomes a long-term mental health condition.*

No support plan is in place, but the student might have been in contact with the Student Service's Wellbeing Team. If the condition lasts for 12 months or more or is likely to last for more than 12 months the student can be advised to meet with a Disability Adviser.

The student has asked for an extension.

What should the student do?

- Follow the School's/Department's extension request procedure.
- Describe the difficulties they are facing, what stage they are currently at with the piece of work (e.g. written X no. of words) and an indication of the length of the extension they anticipate they will need.
- Self-certifications where applicable and, when relevant, medical evidence.

What can the School/Department consider?

- The nature and gravity of the disclosed personal circumstances. Please note that should the School require help/support in this decision from Student Services they should reach out to them directly.
- The nature of the assessment and the preparation time
- The knock-on implications for subsequent assessment deadlines on the module, and on other modules that the student is taking in the School/Department, when feedback is due to be given to all other students, and when overall assignment performance is due to be discussed in class.
- Self-certification and medical evidence where relevant (if there are extenuating circumstances lasting more than 5 working days, not for a registered disability).

Appendix 2

Guidance for managing extension requests where there is no registered or declared disability.

No registered disability or no declared disability.

Situation: The student has asked for an extension.

No support plan and, therefore no recommendation for 'flexible deadlines' from the Disability team.

What should the student do?

- Follow the School's/Department's extension request procedure.
- Describe the difficulties they are facing, what stage they are currently at with the piece of work (e.g. written X no. of words) and an indication of the length of the extension they anticipate they will need.
- Submit self-certifications where applicable and, when relevant, medical evidence.

What can the School/Department consider?

- The nature and gravity of the disclosed personal circumstances. Please note that should the School require help/support in this decision from Student Services they should reach out to them directly.
- The nature of the assessment and the preparation time
- Self-certification and medical evidence where relevant
- The knock-on implications for subsequent assessment deadlines on the module, and on other modules that the student is taking in the School/Department, when feedback is due to be given to all other students, and when overall assignment performance is due to be discussed in class.

Undiagnosed disability/pending further assessments.

Situation: The student has asked for an extension.

There is a temporary support plan in place on MMS due to some evidence/continued working with Student Services to establish full needs.

What should the student do?

- Follow the School's/Department's extension request procedure.
- Indicate that they have a temporary support plan with flexible deadlines.
- Briefly describe the difficulties they are facing, what stage they are currently are at with the piece of work (e.g. written X no. of words) and an indication of the length of the extension they anticipate they will need.

What can the School/Department consider?

- The nature of the assessment and the preparation time
- Self-certification and medical evidence where relevant
- The knock-on implications for subsequent assessment deadlines on the module, and on other modules that the student is taking in the School/Department, when feedback is due to be given to all other students, and when overall assignment performance is due to be discussed in class.

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1	New guidance	uploaded	Administrative Officer Education and Student Experience	07 October 2024