CTF Student Absence, Extensions and Mitigation Policy

Introduction, Background & Scope

1. The Cambridge Theological Federation has a responsibility to monitor student attendance for reasons of student support; to ensure that programme learning outcomes are met; and to meet Home Office requirements in respect of international students. In compliance with the policies of the University of Durham, the Federation must have an agreed procedure for monitoring attendance at compulsory lectures, classes, etc., and for ‘chasing up’ students who are absent without having informed their Module Tutor or Director of Studies. The procedure will typically involve informal contact with the student in the first instance to identify the reasons for the student’s absence so that appropriate action can be taken. The procedure should be made known to students and adhered to. If a student is absent but fails to inform anyone, he/she should be reminded of the proper procedures.

2. The Federation must have processes to record self-certified or other missed academic commitments and to approve extensions to deadlines for assessed work or other forms of mitigation, in the light of section 6.2.6 of University of Durham’s Learning and Teaching Handbook.

3. The Cambridge Theological Federation expects all students to fulfil all compulsory academic commitments, (for instance, attendance at all contact hour classes; submission of summative coursework; examinations and other academic commitments notified as compulsory). However, it is inevitable that some students will experience difficulties outside their control (such as illness or bereavement) that will adversely impact on their work or prevent them from fulfilling their commitments. This document details Federation policy and procedure in respect of such circumstances.

4. The following policy has been drafted in the light of section 6.2.6 of University of Durham’s Learning and Teaching Handbook and covers the procedures for the following circumstances:

   A. Missed Academic Commitments (e.g. absences from class)
      i. How students may inform their tutors and Directors of Studies of the need to be absent from an upcoming class or other compulsory module element, including formative assessment; and what circumstances are acceptable for missing a class;
      ii. How students may inform their tutors and Directors of Studies of the reasons for a past absence from a class or other compulsory module element, including formative assessment;

   B. Extension and Mitigation Requests
      i. How and in what circumstances a student may request a short extension to a deadline for summative coursework;
      ii. How and in what circumstances a student may request a further extension or a long extension for summative coursework;
iii. How and in what circumstances a student may request mitigation in the form of an alternative assessment method, or some other mitigation;

iv. How and in what circumstances a student may be supported academically through a period of adversity or distress.

C. Serious Adverse Circumstances

i. How and in what circumstances a student may request mitigation for missed or poor performance in examinations due to adverse circumstances

ii. How and in what circumstances a student may request mitigation for a low mark or a fail in circumstances where an extension request was not filed within 5 days but there were nevertheless adverse circumstances.

5. The Cambridge Theological Federation is committed to supporting students from all backgrounds. The procedures below include a process for acknowledging the impact specific learning difficulties can have on summative and formative assessment, where those difficulties are outlined in a Diagnostic Assessment Report. The Federation is also committed to the ongoing support of students with specific learning needs and the first point of contact for any student on this question is the Director of Studies.

6. In addition to the procedure below, the University of Durham procedures to apply adjustments for students under the terms of the Equality Act 2010 shall apply.

7. In order for the Cambridge Theological Federation to provide appropriate support, students must inform their Director of Studies as soon as any adverse circumstances occur, using the procedures outlined below. Students must not wait until they receive their marks to inform their Director of Studies. Retrospective requests are only considered in exceptional circumstances.

8. The general approach is to attempt, where possible and appropriate, to deal with circumstances ‘in-year’, for instance through extensions to deadlines for summative coursework. A flowchart outlining the process is available in Appendix Two to this policy.

9. The procedure and forms detailed below relate only to circumstances beyond the student’s control.

10. This policy was approved by the Federation’s Common Awards Management Committee on 25th June 2015.

A. Missed Academic Commitments

11. The Cambridge Theological Federation expects students to meet all academic commitments associated with their programme of study.

12. It is the student’s responsibility to ‘catch up’ on missed academic commitments by making mutually agreeable alternative arrangements (for instance, to read the expected texts; to attend an alternative seminar on the same topic). Module Tutors and/or Directors of Studies will endeavour to support this when possible, but this will not always be feasible.

13. If a student is unwell or affected by some other adverse circumstance or conflicting priorities and as a result is absent or anticipates being absent in the short-term she or he should:

   • discuss the circumstances with the Director of Studies and any other relevant members of staff if pastoral support would be helpful.

AND
• with the help of the Director of Studies if necessary, complete and submit a Self-Certification of Absence Form stating his or her circumstances and the duration of the absence, and then submit this Form to the Director of Studies who will file it with the Office of the Registrar. The Form is available on FedLife and is also available as Appendix One of this policy.

AND

• inform the member(s) of academic staff leading the missed commitment as appropriate. This is particularly important when absence will directly affect the session (e.g. if the student was to give a presentation or participate in group work).

14. Where the missed academic commitment will include a compulsory element of formative assessment, it is the student’s responsibility to ‘catch up’ on missed academic commitments by making mutually agreeable alternative arrangements with the relevant class tutor. Tutors will make every reasonable effort to offer a response to the proposed completion of this element. Non-completion of formative assessment will not be acceptable grounds for an extension where the student has not made reasonable attempts to reschedule. If there are circumstances beyond the student’s control that prevent this rescheduling, the student should refer to section B for extensions and mitigation.

15. A student may self-certify on two occasions per term for a maximum of seven consecutive calendar days on each occasion. A term in this context refers to both term-time and the following vacation. However, a student may not miss more than 20% of any one module or course. The Director of Studies is responsible for checking that these limits have not been exceeded and for investigating any cases of attempts to self-certify on more than two occasions per term. The form should be completed within 48 hours after the problem has occurred.

16. After two such absences per term or semester, a student will be required to have a conversation with an appropriate member of academic staff.

17. Students who need to exceed these limits, by requiring further absences or an absence period of more than 14 consecutive days which will result in missing more than 20% of any module should consult their Director of Studies to discuss their situation. The Director of Studies will explore the best possible means of support (for instance, application for deadline extension, a concession to temporarily take time out from their studies, or arrangements to withdraw from a module) and notify the Office of the Registrar of the decision.

18. Students are trusted to self-certify accurately and honestly, and there is no need to provide further evidence (e.g. a medical certificate) to justify absence from classes. The provision of false information will be regarded as a disciplinary offence by the Federation.

B. Circumstances affecting submission of Summative Coursework

19. The procedure outlined in this section relates to the submission of summative assessed coursework (including dissertations). Different procedures apply to formally timetabled examinations (see below).

20. Students who believe that their academic performance is being adversely affected by circumstances beyond their control are strongly encouraged to contact their Director of Studies to explore the possible options of support.
21. If a student suffers some adverse circumstance beyond his or her control, and as a result anticipates missing a deadline to hand in summatively assessed coursework, or anticipates missing a class which leads directly to the submission of work which counts towards summative assessment (e.g. a presentation) and therefore cannot hand in the associated work, he / she should:

   a. contact his or her Director of Studies as soon as possible to discuss and seek possible mitigation or an extension on the deadline for summative assessment;

   AND

   b. with the help of the Director of Studies if necessary, complete and submit an Extension and Mitigation Form (available on Hedwig, the Federation’s VLE) describing the disruption to study leading to missing the deadline, and then submit this Form to the Director of Studies who, if the request is approved, will transmit it to the Office of the Registrar.

   AND

   c. consult any other relevant staff in his or her Federation Institution for pastoral support, if this would be helpful.

22. All such requests for extensions and mitigation require approval first by the Director of Studies who will consult any other relevant staff such as the Module Tutor, the marker and/or the Office of the Registrar before proposing an outcome. The Office of the Registrar must agree to the proposed outcome. Automatic approval of requests for extensions is not guaranteed.

23. Outcomes may include:

   a. Short Extension - a negotiated extension to a later deadline. In many cases a short extension of 10 calendar days will be an appropriate outcome to a request.

   b. Long Extension - a negotiated extension to a deadline that goes beyond 10 calendar days, but normally not longer than 4 months from the original deadline.

   c. Pre-submission mitigation - i.e. the acceptance of some alternative assessment in place of the prescribed assessment.

   d. Intermission - the discussion may result in agreeing that the appropriate response to the student’s circumstances is time away from study, for an agreed period of time. The details of this process are outlined elsewhere.

   e. Confirmation of the original submission date

**Short Extension**

24. A short extension is defined as an extension to a deadline for summative coursework of up to and including 10 calendar days.

25. Students who are requesting a short extension do not need to provide independent evidence in support of their absence / illness and request for mitigation. Students are trusted to “self-certify” accurately and honestly in these cases, using the Extension and Mitigation Form.

26. The principle is that students can “self-certify” using the Extension Form to support a request for mitigation or extension only if their absence or disruption of study results from circumstances beyond their control. This renders it difficult to produce a definitive list of ‘good
reasons’ under which students may default on their academic commitments through self-certification. The following is indicative but not exhaustive:

a. significant illness, comparable to that which would result in absence from work;
b. hospital appointment, doctor’s appointment, emergency dental appointment;
c. bereavement;
d. the ongoing effects of a specific learning difficulty outlined in a Diagnostic Assessment Report;
e. significant personal problems or events (e.g. a family crisis; being the victim of a crime);
f. significant illness of a close relative or dependent (e.g. sufficient to require absence from the Course or that the student needs to act as a carer).

27. Extension or mitigation requests should not be made in respect of general pressure of deadlines, missing deadlines due to oversleeping, failing to print out work on time, breakdown of printers, lost work due to failure to back-up, and so on. Students are expected to manage their work to be able to cope with such problems.

28. An undergraduate student may request an extension without independent evidence once per assessment component. The Director of Studies is responsible for checking that these limits have not been exceeded. The form must be completed within 48 hours after the problem has occurred.

29. Self-certification may not be used to gain a further extension or further mitigation on top of a previously negotiated extension.

30. If the student wishes a further extension or mitigation in addition to one already received, the student should discuss the situation with the Director of Studies. Such requests may be made but will require independent evidence to be supplied; the process for this, including examples of appropriate evidence are provided for below.

Long Extension

31. A long extension is defined as an extension to a deadline for a piece of summative assessment which is longer than 10 calendar days, but normally no longer than 4 months.

32. In special circumstances the extension can be a later date, providing that it is before the beginning of the next academic year.

33. In exceptional cases it is possible to apply for permission from the Common Awards Management Board for the extension deadline to be in the next academic year. This must be done using the Durham-issued Common Awards Concession Form.

34. Students who are requesting either a long extension or a further extension use the same Extension and Mitigation Form, specifying the nature of their request.

35. However, students making these applications cannot self-certify and will be obliged to provide independent evidence wherever this can reasonably be expected. Approval in these cases will be needed from the Director of Studies, the Office of the Registrar and the Chair of Examiners.

36. Again, an exhaustive list of appropriate causes for a long extension or a further extension request is difficult to formulate. Consult paragraph 26 for an indicative list. For long or further extensions should be added the following circumstances:
a. illness ongoing beyond what was expected and specified in any earlier application;
b. a series of circumstances from the indicative list;
c. circumstances where the student has attempted but been materially unable to ‘catch up’ on formative assessment.

Where c is the case, should the extension be granted, it will be on the understanding that the student is responsible for ‘catching up’ on the formative assessment in advance of the new deadline. The tutor will be required to meet all reasonable requests with respect to rescheduling.

37. Supporting evidence should be submitted with the form if available and appropriate. It is the student’s responsibility to collect and supply this evidence. Examples of acceptable evidence are listed below (this is an indicative list only, and does not cover all instances):

a. a medical certificate; letter from a medical practitioner; or medical records, including a letter or report from a counsellor or other mental health professional. Please note that doctors, consultants and other health care professionals are not obliged to supply medical certificates / letters, and will make a professional judgement on whether this is appropriate. Many medical practitioners charge for the supply of certificates / letters. It is the student’s responsibility to pay any such charges;
b. correspondence from the University’s Disability Support service;
c. a letter of support from the student’s Director of Studies or other appropriate member of teaching staff.

In the event of a letter of supporting from the student’s Director of Studies being employed, the Office of the Registrar and Chair of Exam Board will consider the circumstances without further input from the Director of Studies.

Directors of Studies, the Office of the Registrar and the Chair of Examiners will carefully and sympathetically consider the necessity of students who have previously disclosed a long-term disability to produce independent evidence of circumstances relating to their disability, using their professional discretion. Advice and guidance is available from Durham University’s Disability Support Service.

Directors of Studies and the Office of the Registrar will similarly sympathetically consider whether independent evidence is necessary in respect of adverse circumstances relating to pregnancy and maternity.

The normal expectation is that such supporting evidence should be first-hand and contemporaneous. For example, a professional medical judgment cannot normally be made on a past illness. In such circumstances, a medical certificate is likely to be refused. The Federation will not normally take into consideration uncorroborated ‘hearsay’ evidence, whosoever provides it (e.g. a letter from a medical practitioner stating ‘this patient of mine informs me that they were ill’).

38. However:

a. the Federation recognises that there are some entirely valid circumstances for which no independent evidence can be brought. For this reason, long extension requests will not be discounted simply because they are not supported by independent evidence;
b. independent evidence adds weight to the case only if it supports the conclusion that the student’s studies and/or performance were seriously affected: it will not
influence the Director of Studies, the Office of the Registrar or the Chair of the Exam Board just because it is independent if it does not show this;

39. If the extension request is longer than 4 months it will normally not be granted, on the grounds that a semester of intermission may be a better pastoral response to the student’s circumstances. However, as stated above, in exceptional circumstances a longer extension may be considered. Any extension request that goes into the next academic year must be approved by the Common Awards Management Board as a Concession Request.

40. Guidance on the assessment of extension and mitigation requests is available in section 6.3.6 of Durham University’s Learning and Teaching Handbook.

Pre-submission Mitigation

41. Pre-submission mitigation is defined as a response to circumstances outside a student’s control, that present a material difficulty to the submission of the required assessment component, other than a deadline extension.

42. An indicative example of such mitigation is the alteration to the mode of an assessment component, such as changing an in-class presentation to an alternative when a class context is no longer available, the student having missed this opportunity through circumstances outside their control.

43. The process for requesting mitigation of this type is to consult in the first instance with the Director of Studies, who will support the completion of an Extensions and Mitigation Form. The completed form must be accompanied by a specific negotiated outcome, proposed by the Director of Studies and confirmed by the Office of the Registrar and the Chair of the Exam Board.

Further notes

44. The expectation is that students should apply for mitigation or extensions in advance of deadlines. The Federation recognises that adverse circumstances such as illness will sometimes make this impractical. If a student believes that an adverse circumstance caused the failure to submit summative work by a due deadline, it is his/her responsibility to contact the Module Tutor and Director of Studies as soon as possible to explain the situation and to request a retrospective extension (or other appropriate mitigation). Students in such situations should also complete the Extension Form as soon as possible. The student should normally complete the Form and contact their Director of Studies within 48 hours of the problem occurring, and no later than five days after the deadline for the submission of the assessment.

45. In the event that a student’s circumstances make it impossible to inform the Director of Studies directly during this timeframe, the Director of Studies may, in exceptional circumstances, make the application on the student’s behalf.

46. Whilst all requests for mitigation and extensions should be carefully considered, students should not assume that such requests will automatically be approved. There may also be some instances where it is not reasonable for the Federation to implement a particular type of extension or mitigation requested by a student (for instance, it may not be feasible to offer an extension in respect of a practical assessment). In such instances, the Director of Studies, Module Tutor and/or Office of the Registrar will consider whether another form of mitigation or support would be more appropriate.

47. In considering requests for extensions or mitigation, the Director of Studies will either:
a. accept that the student has good reason due to their circumstances for defaulting on his/her academic commitments and (for retrospective requests) could not reasonably have negotiated an extension or mitigation in advance. In this case the Director of Studies will propose an appropriate extension or retrospective extension, or form of mitigation.

or

b. not accept that the student has good reason for defaulting on their academic commitments and (for retrospective requests) could not have negotiated an extension to the deadline or an excused absence in advance. In this instance, the Director of Studies should inform the student and the Office of the Registrar, who will apply Common Awards penalties for late submission of assessed work as appropriate.

48. Normally the only grounds on which a retrospective extension will be granted are where circumstances beyond the control of the student have prevented submission.

49. The student must be informed in writing of the outcome of the consideration of the student’s request for extension or mitigation. An email to the student’s commonawards email address or, if within Cambridge, a letter delivered to the student’s Federation Institution will be considered suitable written notification. If an extension is granted then the new deadline must be made clear to the student, in writing, and the procedures with regard to meeting the new deadline should be those outlined in this policy statement. If the student fails to meet the new deadline then the Office of the Registrar should apply standard Common Awards policy and penalties on late submission of assessed work. Students should remember that failure to submit summative assessed work on the due date without a negotiated extension or self-certification means that procedures and penalties on late submission of assessed work will apply.

50. Students must advise their Director of Studies if their adverse circumstances are ongoing or if new adverse circumstances come to light, such that they believe that the mitigation or extension applied for is insufficient (for instance, if a student has negotiated an extension due to illness, but their illness continues longer than anticipated). Students are advised to follow the same procedure outlined above. Students must not wait until after the new deadline to advise their Director of Studies of such difficulties.
Process for Common Awards Extensions and Mitigation Requests

1. Adverse circumstances affecting student

2. Student informs DoS, module tutor/staff tutor as needed WITHIN 5 days (earlier if possible).

3. Is a 10-day extension sufficient and acceptable?
   - Yes: Student submits Request for Extension or Mitigation Form (self-certifies)
   - No: Student provides evidence where possible, using Extension or Mitigation Form

4. DoS considers and endorses 10-day extension by sending form to the Programme Manager.
   - Can new deadline be met?
     - Yes: Programme Manager approves extension, updates Hedwig submission area and notifies student/DoS of decision and new deadline
     - No: DoS, Programme Manager and Exam Board Chair agree long extension or other form of mitigation
C. Serious Adverse Circumstances Affecting Performance in Summative Assessment.

51. The process for mitigation or extension requests outlined above does not apply in the following instances:

   a. missed examinations;
   b. serious adverse circumstances affecting performance in examinations or preparations for examinations within five days of the exam date;
   c. serious adverse or ongoing circumstances affecting student’s performance in summative assessments besides examinations when for good reasons beyond their control or that of their Director of Studies the student was unable to bring these circumstances or the extent of their impact to the attention of their Director of Studies within the 5 day or other reasonable time period.

Students should not use the Extensions and Mitigation Form in these instances. Instead students should use the Post-Deadline Mitigation Form (Appendix Four)

52. Serious adverse circumstances are defined as "exceptional personal circumstances, outside your control, that have prevented you from either acquiring or demonstrating the skills, knowledge or competencies required to meet the learning outcomes associated with an assessment that contributes to the qualification for which you are studying, notwithstanding your best efforts, in consultation with your Director of Studies, to mitigate those circumstances." Students who anticipate that serious adverse circumstances will impact upon their examinations or other deadlines are advised to consult their Director of Studies to discuss possible support.

53. For an indicative list of serious adverse circumstances see paragraphs 26 and 34, with the added proviso that the student was unable to bring these circumstances or the extent of their impact to the attention of their Director of Studies within the 5 day or other reasonable time period of the submission deadline or examination date.

54. It is expected that the student will request post-deadline mitigation when the mark that is likely to result is a zero for non-submission or absence from an exam, or a piece of work is of a much lower standard than can reasonably be expected from a student. It is expected that a student will request post-deadline mitigation having submitted summative assessment/s, or missed or completed an exam, in adverse circumstances which have seriously affected his/her work, which need to be brought to the attention of the Common Awards Board of Examiners when they make a final decision on the student’s progression to the next year of study or his/her class of degree. The Board of Examiners has discretion to take serious adverse circumstances into account when making decisions regarding progression to the following year of study or the degree classification.

55. Where the student wishes serious adverse circumstances to be taken into account regarding their progression to their next year of study, the student must inform the Board of Examiners of any serious adverse circumstances before the board meets. Students should not wait until they receive their marks to inform the Board.

56. The Cambridge Theological Federation will therefore advertise to students:

   a. the need to bring such information to the attention of the Board of Examiners before the meeting;
   b. the date of the meeting of the Board of Examiners and the date by which post submission mitigation forms must be submitted [this date must always be after the last examination set by the Federation for which results are to be considered by the Board];
c. how to access support in completing the SAC form, the first point of contact for which will be the Director of Studies;

d. the name of the person to whom the information should be sent.

57. Students must submit evidence to the Board of Examiners using the Post-deadline Mitigation Form. The Director of Studies can provide assistance in completing the form. Students submitting a Post-deadline Mitigation Form in respect of examinations are advised to submit the form after the relevant examination(s), in order to better articulate to the Board of Examiners the impact upon their performance.

58. Students should include independent evidence regarding their circumstances. Paragraphs 35 and 36 of this policy shall apply to that evidence. This evidence must explain why the student was unable to notify their Director of Studies of their adverse circumstances during the 5 day or other reasonable period following the submission deadline or exam date. In addition, the Board of Examiners will need to have evidence that the student’s 'normal' standard of work was at a higher level than that of the assessment in question. This is so that the Board can make a fair assessment of the student's performance once the illness or other problem has been discounted. If no such evidence exists, the Board cannot exercise discretion in favour of the student. Appropriate evidence can be offered through a written reference from the student’s Tutor or Module Tutor.

59. If a mark has been awarded for an exam or assignment the Board of Examiners cannot alter a student's mark. It can only decide that, despite the relatively low mark, the student will still be able to progress to the next year of study or be awarded a higher class of degree. The student’s transcript will show the mark actually obtained.

60. A student must use the Post-deadline Mitigation Form to tell the Board of Examiners of his/her problems directly and must not assume that because they have told someone in the Federation (such as the Director of Studies), the Board of Examiners will know.

61. Neither the Federation nor the University will pass on information received by the Board of Examiners in the context of serious adverse circumstances to third parties.

62. When a student has had an examination concession (for example to give extra time in an exam because of a medical problem) the Board of Examiners will not take those circumstances into account over and above the terms of the concession unless the student submits a Post-deadline Mitigation Form which additionally brings the circumstances to the attention of the board with evidence that the concession did not mitigate their problem.

63. Concessions such as extra time in an exam are intended to provide an environment which takes account of the student’s circumstances as they are understood at that time. After the examination, the student’s work is treated in the same way as any other student’s work: it is marked by the same criteria and the marks are treated in the same way by the Board of Examiners. In bringing his/her circumstances to the attention of the board the student is expected to show that his/her situation was not adequately mitigated by the concessionary adjustment.

**d. Monitoring of student progress**

Student progress is monitored at examination board meetings and at the annual review of programmes meeting. The Federation is in the process of purchasing a new student records database in order to improve the data on which the monitoring process is based.
Student progress is also monitored by Directors of Studies, who, from 2016-17, have access to all of a student’s feedback and marks on Hedwig, the Federation’s VLE. The Director of Studies may recommend that the student apply for an extension or notify the CTF office of severe adverse circumstances and assist him or her in the completion of the appropriate form.