

STRETCHED DEGREE POLICY (DISABILITY AND HEALTH)

1. Scope of the Policy

This policy covers situations in which an applicant or student, the Counselling and Disability Service (CDS) or an applicant/student's academic School/Department concludes that, due to disability or serious health related issues, the student will not be able to adequately engage with his/her programme on a full-time basis but would be able to engage effectively with a reduced study load.

If a registered student is unable to engage with a reduced study load, leave of absence or withdrawal should be discussed with the Personal Tutor depending on the likely duration of the issues which have arisen.

2. Definitions and Application of the Policy

2.1 Disability

The law defines a disability as :

“A long-term physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal, day-to-day activities. “

Long term usually means that the condition has lasted for more than one year (there are exceptions to this; some conditions such as cancer, and some mental health issues). The definition of disability includes physical disabilities, sensory impairments, specific learning differences (such as dyslexia), Autistic Spectrum Conditions, mental health issues, and long term medical conditions.

2.2 Stretched Degree

The term “stretched degree” in this policy is used to describe the arrangement made when a student, who would in other respects be able to study on a full-time basis, is permitted to study on a part-time basis as a result of the impact on their studies of a serious disability or long term health issue.

2.3 Application of the Policy and Formal Responsibilities

For the purposes of considering whether a stretched degree is a reasonable adjustment based on disability/health criteria, all other avenues of reasonable adjustment should normally have been exhausted. In such cases, the staff in CDS will make the final decision on whether a stretched degree is an appropriate and reasonable adjustment in respect of the student's disability/health issues and the academic School/Department will make the final decision on whether it is academically feasible to offer a stretched degree for the programme concerned. Consideration may need to be given to the expected total duration of the student's studies and whether the University anticipates continuing to offer the degree programme concerned over the required period of time.

3. Background to the Policy

The University has a duty of care towards disabled students and those with serious health issues which might be exacerbated were they to continue studying on a full-time basis. The Equality Act (2010) places a duty on the University to make reasonable adjustments in such circumstances. A stretched degree programme would constitute such an adjustment, and therefore it is incumbent upon the University to have a policy and procedure in place for considering the use of this potential adjustment.

4. Applicant/Student Responsibility

Applicants who have declared a disability will be contacted by CDS to discuss potential reasonable adjustments should they be admitted to the University. In the case of current students in most instances the responsibility will lie with the student to contact CDS or their School/Department if they wish to be considered for a stretched degree because they feel that other adjustments are not sufficient for them to be able to engage fully with their programme. Although the personal responsibilities of the student underpin this policy it is recognised that in some instances a student's disability/health issue might be acting as a barrier for them in considering the best option in relation to their studies. In such instances, staff in Schools/Departments or CDS may suggest the possibility of a stretched degree to a student. Students will not normally¹ be required to take a stretched degree if they do not wish to except via the final stage of the Fitness to Study procedure (insert link). However, where the Fitness to Study procedure has not been invoked, if a student declines the offer of a stretched degree where this is strongly recommended as the best mechanism by which to deliver reasonable adjustments for him/her to access the programme, the student will be asked to provide their reasons in writing and the University does not accept that it has any liability under the Equality Act (2010) if the student subsequently feels that the alternative adjustments are not adequate to enable him/her to reach his/her full potential.

5. Financial Implications

Any decision to offer a stretched degree option to applicants/students will be based on the applicant's/student's ability (or the limitations on their ability) to engage academically with their programme of study on a full-time basis and will not take account of the financial implications of such an option. Therefore, any member of staff advising applicants/students who are considering a stretched degree should highlight that there may be financial implications for the student as described in this policy.

Individuals who stretch any or all of the years of their programme will be charged tuition fees on a pro-rata basis (i.e. they will be charged for the modules that they register on in each year).

There may be other financial implications for individuals who choose and are permitted to stretch their degree. In particular, those in receipt of financial support from external bodies may find that the external body is not willing to fund the change in mode of study and/or the extension to their studies, so students should make enquiries about this aspect before deciding to pursue a stretched degree option.

Applicants/students should be advised to discuss their financial situation with staff in the Student Advice and Support Centre before making a decision in order to be prepared for any financial implications, and to discuss possible sources of alternative funding.

6. Academic Implications

6.1 Programmes and Modules

- (a) One year of a full-time degree programme may not normally be stretched over more than two academic years. Exceptionally, a longer period may be considered where this is considered to be the best reasonable adjustment in response to a applicant's/student's health/disability issue.

¹ Where a stretched degree has been recommended by a Stage 3 Panel under the Fitness to Study procedure, the student will be required to stretch their degree.

- (b) Where modules from one Part of a degree are taken over two academic years, the split should normally be 60:60, 50:70 or 70:50 between the two academic years. In exceptional circumstances, the split may be outside these criteria with School/Departmental agreement.

6.2 Assessments

- (a) In accordance with para 6.1 above, students on stretched degrees will register for an agreed credit weight of modules allowed by the Programme Specification for their degree in each academic year and will undertake all the assessments pertaining to these modules in that year of the stretched degree.
- (b) Students should be aware that "stretching" their degree could have implications for the timing of reassessments and/or progression. All undergraduate students on stretched degrees will be considered annually by a Programme Board in June/July. However, reassessment rights will only be awarded in relation to the modules the student has been registered for in that academic year where the student has:
 - (i) failed to achieve the minimum module mark requirements as set out in Regulation XX (ie 30%) and/or Programme Specifications (which could be higher than 30%), and/or
 - (ii) failed to achieve modular credit (40%) in 30 credits or more. However, students will have to "carry" up to 20 credits with marks between 30 and 39% until the final Programme Board for their Part/year of Programme before having the opportunity to exercise any final resit rights identified when all their marks for the Part are available.

7. Stretched Degree Procedure

The following sections set out the procedure for requesting a stretched degree.

- (a) At the earliest opportunity the applicant/student should discuss the possibility of a stretched degree with staff in CDS. Where appropriate, staff in CDS may initiate the conversation in a proactive attempt to help the student to manage their studies in accordance with their disability/health issue. It is expected that CDS will initiate the conversation with applicants who have declared a substantial disability/health issue, particularly if their most recent studies have been on a part-time basis. At this stage, applicants/students will be strongly encouraged to discuss the financial implications of a stretched degree with staff in the Student Advice and Support Centre. Where possible for current students, this discussion should take place before any assessments have been taken in the Part that is under consideration to be stretched. Modules where assessments have already taken place will not be removed from a student's record and the Impaired Performance procedure should be used in these circumstances.
- (b) If informal discussions result in a stretched degree appearing to be a good option for the applicant/student, the individual should make a formal request for a stretched degree in writing. Relevant supporting medical or other evidence will be required of the nature of their disability/health issues if this is not already available. CDS staff will give formal consideration to the application and confirm that a stretched degree represents a reasonable adjustment for the student. If the request is not approved the applicant/student will be given reasons for the

decision in writing. Academic Schools/Departments are not expected to consider applications for a stretched degree without confirmation that it is a reasonable adjustment by CDS staff.

- (c) Where an application is supported by CDS, it will be forwarded to the applicant's/student's academic School/Department where the Programme Director, in discussion with the student's Personal Tutor, will assess the application and indicate whether or not they support it, including an indication of the proposed schedule of modules. Support from CDS staff is no guarantee that the application will be approved by the applicant's/student's School/Department. The final decision on any request remains with the relevant School/Department based on the academic feasibility of the request and the duration in which the programme will continue to be available. If the request is not approved the applicant/student will be given reasons for the decision in writing.
- (d) If the Programme Director supports the application, they will request a waiver of programme regulations from the appropriate AD(T). If the AD(T) supports the waiver of programme regulations the approved application will be sent to the Academic Registry (Student Office).
- (e) The Student Office will process the application and amend the student's record accordingly.
- (f) Applications that are not supported by CDS will not be forwarded to the School/Department.
- (g) As noted above, if an application is declined by either CDS or the School/Department, the applicant/student must be informed in writing with an explanation of the reasons for the decision to decline. The applicant/student may request a discussion with the staff who have taken the decision (in person or by telephone). Applicants who are dissatisfied may lodge a complaint in accordance with the complaints procedure set out in the University's Admissions Policy. Current students who are dissatisfied may make a complaint in accordance with the Ordinance XXXVIII Student Complaints Procedures.

8. Further Information

For further information, please contact:

The Disability Office
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01509 222770

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