LTC16D106

Title:	***Extenuating Circumstances: Self-Certification***
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Issue

Following the previous review and recommendations made by the Self-Certification Working Group and the resolution of LTC, the Working Group re-convened to consider the concerns raised and present a new set of recommendations.

Recommendation

LTC is asked to endorse the proposed changes to the policy based on the following recommendations:

1) The University should continue to offer students extension by Self-certification (for 2017/18 onwards)

2) The number of Self-certifications possible if required should be extended from one per academic year to two. One can be used at reassessment if not used previously (for 2018/19 onwards)

3) A Self-certification extension will have a duration of 72 hours with work to be submitted before 3pm the next working day (for 2018/19 onwards)

4) Any item of coursework that has a deadline within the Self-certification period will be covered by the extension (for 2018/19 onwards)

5) Only coursework can be covered by Self-certification and the definition of coursework should be strengthened to exclude practical work such as lab demos and presentations (for 2017/18 onwards)

Resource Implications

Five weeks of systems development time is required to support the proposed changes. This cannot be scheduled to meet 2017/18 implementation. Systems developments are already scheduled to support the current policy in 2017/18 and this can continue.

Risk Implications

None

Equality and Diversity

There are no equality or diversity implications associated with this proposal.

Timing of decisions

Both the policy and guidance will be in place for the academic year 2018/19. The changes were originally proposed for 2017/18 but the associated systems developments have to necessarily delay implementation. Recommendations 1 and 5 can be implemented for 2017/18 as they are not dependant on development time. A minor rewrite of the policy and guidance will be made to accommodate this change for 2017/18 with the full rewrite postponed until 2018/19.

Further Information

Please direct any enquiries to Laura Thompson (laura.thompson@uea.ac.uk, x7374).

LTC resolved that further consideration was required on any changes to the self-certification policy before a decision could be made by the Committee. Further details can be found relating to the conversation at July 2016 LTC (LTC15M007).

Further related LTC discussions are referenced LTC15D174, LTC15D107, LTC15D064, LTC13D048, LTC13D035, LTC12D145.

Background

Following the previous review and recommendations made by the Self-Certification Working Group and the resolution of LTC, the Working Group re-convened to consider the concerns raised and present a new set of recommendations. The Working Group included representation from the Faculties, Student Union and LTS.

1) The group again concluded that whilst Self-Certification presented some practical concerns around the delayed or fragmented submission, marking and return of coursework, it was a necessary process. The extension length would be such that it was likely that the marking would still be ongoing of the work submitted without extension and so not present a significant delay or disruption to this process.

   The purpose of Self-Certification is to cover unforeseen, short-term problems which could impact on a student's ability to submit their coursework but where obtaining evidence is either impractical or impossible. This includes minor illnesses, urgent family emergencies, urgent caring responsibilities and personal circumstances such as bereavement.

   Self-certification availability is mixed across the sector with differing viewpoints on its necessity, practicality and appropriateness. The key view of the Working Group is that whatever our ultimate viewpoint on this is, it is problematic to not allow Self-certification when it has already been available.

   The arguments presented at UEA to not allow any Self-certification and presented by others in the sector as to why they do not allow this are based around trust. Concerns over strategic and dishonest use were carefully considered by the Working Group. The group determined that whilst the minority may abuse such trust this should not be used as a justification for removing a much-needed mechanism for students who are genuinely in need of a short-term extension where Self-certification may be the only practical solution.

   Concerns have been raised that the use of Self-certification at UEA has increased and with it the problems outlined have increased. For the most recent two complete years (2014/15 and 2015/16) the number of Undergraduate Self-certifications has increased by 297, a 5.8% increase. However the number of active Undergraduate students has increased by 7.4% so proportionally Self-certification has decreased marginally.

2) The recommendation to extend the number of Self-certifications allowed in an academic year is to reasonably accommodate that the circumstances this could cover can easily occur more than once in a year without demonstrating a persistent problem. Students may experience short-term illness and other personal circumstances within the same year and struggle to provide evidence for these.

3) The recommendation for a Self-Certification extension to be 72 hours arises from LTC15M007 where most supported this timescale. This also supports the requirement that students with short term, infectious illnesses are not permitted to come into contact with other students due to the risk of contamination for 72 hours.

   The Working Group considered how to fairly and practically determine the extended submission date for coursework given that the day the extension is sought can influence the actual additional time available. An extension on a Monday would require submission on Thursday whereas an extension on a Wednesday would require submission on Saturday and so by default Monday. The group felt that the only pragmatic solution was that all extensions are for 72 hours with work submitted the next working day. The extension length doesn't change but work can only be submitted when the University is open.

4) The recommendation for a Self-certification extension to cover all coursework due within the extension period is based on the assumption that if one deadline is compromised by illness etc then additional deadlines will also be.

5) The group raised specific concerns about the use of Self-Certification for practical work such as laboratory demonstrations and presentations where the use would cause disruption and complex rearrangements. It was agreed that the definition of coursework for Self-Certification extensions should be strengthened to exclude practical work.