

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES FRAMEWORK

1 Introduction

- 1.1 During their studies, students may encounter significant personal difficulties that are outside of their control and impact on their ability to study, prepare for or complete assessments and or examinations. This Exceptional Circumstances (EC) Framework sets of the University's arrangements for considering requests for mitigation in such circumstances.
- 1.2 The EC Framework is in place to ensure all students have a fair and equal opportunity to demonstrate academic achievement, while maintaining academic standards and supporting students experiencing temporary detriment.
- 1.3 This Framework outlines the principles to be followed when students apply for ECs. The accompanying Exceptional Circumstances Procedural Guide (hereafter the EC Procedural Guide) sets out the process for submission and consideration of an EC claim.
- 1.4 This Framework is complementary to the University of Sussex [Progression and Award Regulations](#) and the [Procedures on Research Degrees](#).
- 1.5 Further information on the EC Framework and Procedural Guidance is published on the [Student Hub](#).

2 Eligibility to submit an Exceptional Circumstances claim

- 2.1 The following students are eligible to submit an EC claim:
 - Current individual students registered on a foundation year, undergraduate or postgraduate taught programme leading to an award of the University of Sussex (including the Joint AI Institute, Zhejiang Gongshang, University China).
 - Current individual students registered at the University of Sussex on a research degree that includes a taught component may submit for assessments associated with the taught components of the degree only. For the research element, students should refer to the [Procedures on Research Degrees](#).

- Students not registered on a University award, but undertaking assessments as part of study at the University of Sussex (Visiting and Exchange students), may submit an EC claim for their Sussex assessment(s).
- Students registered on a course delivered by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), which for these purposes is considered an academic unit of the University of Sussex.

2.2 Where a student's circumstances prevent them from being able to submit an EC Claim, designated staff from the Division for the Student Experience, including Student Advice and Guidance may be permitted, exceptionally and with the student's permission to submit a claim on behalf of the student.

3. Ineligible to submit an exceptional circumstances claim

3.1 Students on a work placement should use the sickness reporting systems in place at their employer/placement provider. An EC claim can only be submitted for the placement portfolio/project, for non-submission or late submission only.

3.2 This Framework does not apply to University of Sussex students during a period of study abroad for assessments taken at a host institution. Students affected by ECs during a period of study abroad should use the equivalent procedures of their host institution.

3.3 Students registered on a course with the Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) should submit requests for [Additional Considerations](#) via the process operated by the University of Brighton.

4. Application of the Framework

4.1 Students may submit an EC claim for any assessment for which a summative grade is given, including those graded on a pass/fail basis. EC claims cannot be submitted for formative assessment, as these do not carry marks.

4.2 A student may submit an EC claim following the process set out in the EC Procedural Guide if there are exceptional circumstances that have negatively impacted their ability to study, prepare or complete an assessment or to sit an examination which is determined by the University as reasonably:

- a) Short term
- b) Arisen unexpectedly; and
- c) Beyond the student's control

4.3 All parts of 4.2 must be met for a claim to be pursued via the EC procedure. The University's decision on whether a circumstance meets this definition is final and is based on case-by-case judgement, taking into account how the situation affected the specific assessment.

- 4.4 The EC Procedural Guide sets out indicative, but not exhaustive, examples of circumstances that may or not be accepted.

5 **Types of Exceptional Circumstances claims that can be pursued**

- 5.1 The following types of Exceptional Circumstances claims can be pursued by a student:

a) Late Submission

This is where a student has missed the assessment deadline due to the circumstances they have experienced and submits their assessment within the late submission period, **if provided**. A student will ordinarily receive a late penalty for submitting during this period. In this circumstance a student will be seeking the removal of the late penalty where an EC is accepted.

b) Non-submission

This is when a student does not submit the work required for the assessment due to the circumstances they have experienced. A student will ordinarily receive a mark of zero when this occurs.

c) Non-attendance

This is when a student does not attend an in-person examination or practical assessment because of the circumstances they have experienced

d) Impairment

This is when a student attends an assessment or submits the work required for the assessment, but they believe that their individual circumstances have seriously impaired their academic performance and will result in an unrepresentative mark.

An EC claim for impairment can only be submitted once the examination or assessment deadline has passed and before the published deadline. Anticipatory EC claims for impairment (i.e. I think my performance might be affected) cannot be submitted.

- 5.2 For types b), c) and d) students are requesting that the appropriate examination board takes into account their claim (if accepted) when viewing their wider academic performance prior to the publication of stage results. An examination board may decide to apply an academic remedy in response. This may be, for example, the offer of an uncapped resit opportunity. Further details of possible outcomes are contained in the EC Procedural Guide.

6. **Circumstances not covered by this Framework**

- 6.1 This Framework does not apply to:

6.1.1 Longstanding or chronic health conditions as ongoing support for these should be provided in the form of Reasonable Adjustments (RAs). The definition of a long-term condition would not usually meet the definition of an EC. However, an EC may be required where a student is:

- Experiencing an atypical flare-up, fluctuation or deterioration in their ongoing condition meaning that the reasonable adjustments in place are no longer sufficient at this stage
- Experiencing a temporary issue in the implementation/presence of their reasonable adjustments so temporary measures are required
- Experiencing an EC circumstance that is unrelated to their disability/reasonable adjustments.

6.1.2 Situations in which a student can or could have taken reasonable steps either to avoid or to mitigate the impact on their performance.

6.1.3 The Framework also does not:

- Allow for the marking process or a student's marks to be adjusted. An EC claim shall remain distinct from the marking process and actual marks shall be determined solely on the basis of the work submitted.
- Apply to disruption or circumstances that affect a whole cohort of student at the time of or during an assessment. This includes but is not limited to fire alarms and IT failures (i.e. disruption to Canvas or Turnitin) that coincide with an assessment. Where this occurs, group mitigations will be put in place and communicated to students. Individual mitigating circumstances requests should not be submitted in these scenarios.
- Apply to events that impact a significant proportion of students, for example public health emergencies or industrial action. This is because the University will usually put in place measures to address such eventualities, removing the burden for students to submit individual Exceptional Circumstances claims. Separate guidance will be provided when such circumstances arise.
- Apply to absences from timetabled teaching activities.
- Allow the approval of extensions or the provision of alternative forms of assessment. Students with disabilities should contact the Disability Advice service.

7. Responsibilities

7.1 All Students

7.1.1 Students are responsible for managing their own personal circumstances and are expected to be able to cope with normal life events alongside their studies, and to manage workload appropriately.

7.1.2 Students can reasonably expect a level of pressure around the time of assessments which may lead to some feelings of stress or anxiety. There are [resources](#) and

support services offered by the University to help plan and deal with the pressure of assessment.

- 7.1.3 Where a student feels that there are circumstances that are affecting them adversely, it is their responsibility to seek advice and professional help to assist in resolving the problem. Where possible, students should inform their School/Faculty of any issues which they believe are having an impact on their studies within a reasonable timescale.
- 7.1.4 If a student experiences a situation or circumstance that may negatively impact their ability to study, prepare or complete an assessment or examination, that is short-term, arisen unexpectedly and is beyond the student's control, it is their responsibility to submit an EC claim as close to the assessment deadline/exam date as possible and not later than the published EC deadline. The accompanying EC Procedural Guide provides guidance to students on how to submit a claim for consideration.
- 7.1.5 Students must submit EC claims and evidence (as appropriate) prior to the published deadlines.

7.2 Divisional Responsibilities [Division for the Student Experience]

7.2.1 The Student Administration team will:

- Maintain this Framework and associated EC Procedural Guidance.
- Publicise the deadlines and procedure for submitting Exceptional Circumstance claims.
- Ensure that staff responsible for advising students are fully informed of what circumstances might warrant consideration under this Framework.
- Ensure that each case is reviewed equitably and compassionately taking account of context, fact and evidence.
- Ensure that all procedural timeframes are observed and that outcomes are disseminated in accordance with this Framework and associated procedures and guidance.

7.2.2 The Student Advice and Guidance team is responsible for providing information, advice and guidance to students on non-academic issues. This includes advice on dealing with Exceptional Circumstances and the submission of EC claims.

7.3 Faculty/School staff

7.3.1 Offer advice and guidance in accordance with this Framework and the accompanying Procedural Guidance.

7.3.2 Signpost students to specialist support.

7.4 Examination Boards

- 7.4.1 To ensure the privacy of students, Examination Boards do not consider the personal circumstances of an individual student, which led to an EC claim. Authority is delegated to the Student Administration team to determine whether a claim is valid in line with this Framework.
- 7.4.2 Accepted EC claims will be reported to the relevant Examination Board for consideration. The Examination Board will make an academic judgement in relation to each EC claim, informed by the student's overall performance and will determine what academic outcome is to be provided to a student, if any.
- 7.4.3 An examination board is under no obligation to provide a remedy where an approved Exceptional Circumstances claim is present. All outcomes are determined in accordance with the [University's Progression and Award Regulations](#). The accompanying EC Procedural Guidance outlines typical outcomes that can be made as part of this process.

8. Providing information to support an Exceptional Circumstances claim

- 8.1 It is reasonable for the University to request evidence to support an EC claim. Evidence should be in the form of a letter or email from someone who knows the student in a professional capacity and who can independently verify the circumstances that a student details in their claim. Evidence should be robust, must be dated and correspond with the assessment date/s in question, where appropriate. The accompanying EC Procedural Guide sets out the type of evidence which is likely to be accepted or not accepted.
- 8.2 Where possible, original documentation should be scanned. Students should be prepared to produce the original document, on request. Documents should be submitted in English. Where documents are in other languages the University may request a verified/official translation
- 8.3 The University recognises that there are circumstances that are challenging to provide evidence for and also that it would not be proportionate to do so. This is reflective of practice in the workplace. Consequently, self-certification will be permitted under the following criteria:
- a) A student may self-certify for a maximum of two [2] occasions during a single academic year. Alternative evidence will usually be required for further occasions.
 - b) Where self-certification is used/permitted, a single self-certificate can only cover a maximum seven [7]-day period (calendar days). A further self-certificate or evidence will be required for day eight [8] and beyond.
 - c) Self-certification can be used for all requested outcomes permitted via this Framework, where a claim is accepted.

- 8.4 The University reserves the right to accept a greater level of self-certification and other forms of evidence, in addition to self-certification, where this is deemed appropriate. The EC Procedural Guidance provides further details on potential circumstances where this may occur.
- 8.5 The University reserves the right to contact the evidence provider to check that it is genuine
- 8.6 Any student suspected of submitting a fraudulent EC claim and/or falsifying or fabricating supporting evidence may be referred to the [University's Disciplinary procedure](#).

9. Timeframes

- 9.1 Exceptional Circumstances deadlines will take place throughout the academic year and will be published via dedicated [webpages](#).
- 9.2 All EC claims are required to be submitted with accompanying documents and evidence, at the earliest opportunity and , by the published date and time, that are set according to level of study, course and the assessment period in question. This is to ensure that claims can be considered in a timely way and that the outcome of accepted claims can be made available to examination boards, minimising any delay to progression or award decisions.
- 9.3 An EC claim can be declined if it is submitted after the published deadline.
- 9.4 An EC claim that is submitted on time, but subsequent requested evidence is not received in time, may be declined. Where this is the case, alternative mechanisms for redress may (subject to their respective rules) need to be explored by a student if the deadline is passed e.g. the [Academic Appeals](#) process.
- 9.5 Cases that are submitted on time and accompanied by suitable supporting documentation will normally be reviewed and an outcome communicated within 14 University working days¹. This outcome will confirm whether a request has been upheld or not upheld. With the exception of a request to remove the late penalty for late submission within the late submission period, all other upheld EC claims will be reported to the next meeting of the relevant Examination Board that will determine the appropriate remedy.

10. Consideration of Exceptional Circumstances claim(s)

- 10.1 The Exceptional Circumstances process consists of three stages:

¹ University working days means the days when the University is officially open for normal business. This typically means Monday to Friday and excludes weekends, University closure days and UK public holidays.

a) Stage 1: Assessment Stage

Appropriate personnel within the Division for the Student Experience will assess/determine if an EC claim can be accepted, subject to this Framework and the accompanying Procedural Guidance. Complex cases may be escalated to a senior member of staff, within the Division, for a decision if appropriate.

Students will be notified if their EC claim has been accepted, declined or if they must complete further steps for a decision to be made (subject to specified timeframes and published deadlines, whichever is sooner).

b) Stage 2: Outcome Stage

Accepted EC claims for non-submission, absence or impairment will be passed to the applicable examination board for consideration. The examination board will make an academic judgement in relation to each EC claim, informed by the student's overall performance and determine what academic outcome is to be provided, if any.

For accepted EC claims, the examination board permit the Stage 1 process to remove any late penalties that have been applied, where present. All other outcomes must be passed to Stage 2 for decision.

c) Stage 3: Appeal Stage

Where a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of either Stage 1 or Stage 2, they should submit an [Academic Appeal](#). Students are advised to consult the Academic Appeal process and to comply with any specified requirements, including the timeframes for submitting an appeal.

11. Confidentiality, Data Protection and Further Support

11.1 Details disclosed as part of the Exceptional Circumstances process could indicate that a student may need additional support. University services (support and/or academic schools) may contact students with regard to the circumstances they have disclosed in their claim. The purpose of such contact is to focus on their attendance, engagement and achievement, wellbeing and/or any safeguarding/legal responsibilities (if applicable). The University reserves the right to refer a student to alternative processes/procedures where appropriate, for example Fitness to Study or the reasonable adjustment processes.

11.2 Information disclosed as part of the EC process is strictly confidential. All information will be processed and handled in accordance with the University's [Data Protection Policy](#), and [Privacy Notice](#).

11.3 The University reserves the right to determine which policy/procedures are utilised to respond to circumstances disclosed as part of the EC process.

12. Other relevant regulations, policies and procedures

- 12.1 The University's [Fitness to Study Procedure](#) outlines how the University will respond to situations where there are concerns that a student may not be fit to study. The procedure sets out the support available to students and staff.
- 12.2 Any programme of study which has a practice component which leads to a professional registration will be governed by a requirement that students demonstrate their [Suitability for Professional Practice](#). A student's Fitness to Practice may be challenged when their behaviour, health and/or professional conduct give cause for concern. In these circumstances, a student should be considered under the Fitness to Practice procedure.
- 12.3 A student wishing to appeal against an academic decision made by the University should refer to the [Academic Appeal Regulations](#).
- 12.4 Information for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students considering [temporary or permanent withdrawal](#) because of their exceptional circumstances can be found on the Student Hub.
- 12.5 The [Policy on Research Degrees](#) provides information to students registered on research degrees wishing to suspend their studies or extend their candidature due to exceptional circumstances.
- 12.6 Students who have experienced sexual violence or misconduct, bullying, harassment, a hate incident, domestic abuse, discrimination, stalking or spiking can disclose an incident and get support using [Report + Support](#), the University's online tool for recording and responding to these behaviours.

13. Oversight and Reporting

- 13.1 The Education and Student Regulations Sub-Committee (ESRSC) is responsible for overseeing this Framework and the accompanying Procedural Guide.
- 13.2 The Division for the Student Experience will produce an annual report on the Exceptional Circumstances process that will detail the number of claims received and analytical data for development and process enhancement purposes.

Review/Contact/References	
Title:	Exceptional Circumstances Framework
Last review date:	July 2025
Revision History:	2025-26 (approval of updated Framework)
Next review date:	2027-2028 (3 years, unless otherwise required)
Division:	Division for the Student Experience

Framework owner:	Director for the Student Experience
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