



UNIVERSITY
OF SUSSEX

Division for the Student Experience

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES Procedural guide

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Who can submit an Exceptional Circumstances claim?	2
3. What are Exceptional Circumstances?.....	3
4. Examples of circumstances	3
5. When an EC claim might not be the solution.....	6
6. When to submit a claim	6
7. What can you claim for?	6
8. Exceptional Circumstances and long-standing/chronic health conditions and Reasonable Adjustments (RAs)	7
9. How to submit a claim.....	8
10. Evidence to support your claim.....	8
11. Self-certification	10
12. Confidentiality of your claim	10
13. Checklist	11
14. Fraudulent claims and falsification/fabrication of evidence.....	11
15. I've submitted an EC claim, but I would like to withdraw it from consideration	11
16. I've submitted my claim – what happens next?.....	12
17. Sources of advice and further information	13

Exceptional Circumstances

1. Introduction

Students are generally expected to manage normal life events, workload and the usual pressures around assessments and exams. However, we recognise that during your studies you may face significant personal or health difficulties that are outside of your control that affect your ability to study, prepare for, or complete assessments or exams. If you find yourself in such a situation you should let the University know by applying for Exceptional Circumstances (EC).

This guidance is designed to help you understand:

- What counts as Exceptional Circumstances
- How to make a claim
- What evidence may be required

This guidance has been devised to help provide students with information on how to make a claim for exceptional circumstances and should be read in conjunction with the Exceptional Circumstances Framework.

2. Who can submit an Exceptional Circumstances claim?

You can submit an EC claim if you are studying on:

- A Foundation Year
- An Undergraduate degree
- A taught Postgraduate degree
- Undergraduate and taught Postgraduate degrees at the Joint AI Institute, Zhejiang Gongshang, China
- A Postgraduate Research degree that includes taught modules (Note: the EC process only applies to the taught modules. For the research element please see the [Procedures on Research Degrees](#) or talk to your Supervisor)

This guidance also applies to:

- Students who are not registered for a University of Sussex award but are taking assessments as part of study at the University of Sussex (e.g. Visiting & Exchange students), may submit an EC claim for their Sussex assignments.
- Students studying with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

Students on placement

If you are on a work placement and experience exceptional circumstances, please follow the sickness reporting procedures provided by your placement organisation or discuss your situation with your line manager.

You can submit an EC claim only for your placement portfolio or project, and only for late submission or non-submission.

Students on a study abroad year or semester

If you are studying abroad and encounter exceptional circumstances, you should use the equivalent processes offered by your host institution.

Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) students

If you are studying with BSMS, you should submit requests for [additional consideration](#) via Brighton University.

3. What are Exceptional Circumstances?

An Exceptional Circumstance (EC) is a circumstance that may negatively impact a student's 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
- c) Beyond the student's control

All three criteria must be met in order for a claim to be successful.

You should consider submitting an EC claim if your circumstances have affected your ability to complete or submit an assignment, submit an assignment on time, take an examination or may have negatively impacted your performance.

4. Examples of circumstances

Below we have provided you with a list of possible scenarios that may or may not qualify for exceptional circumstances. These examples are non-exhaustive and are indicative only. All EC claims still have to meet the EC criteria as detailed in section 3 above. The same circumstances may not always result in the same outcome.

For example, a bad cold would usually be seen as a normal part of everyday life, so it wouldn't normally meet the criteria for an EC claim. Students are expected to plan and anticipate common occurrences such as this by managing their workload and for example working ahead of assessment deadlines. However, if you have a bad cold on the day of an exam or other in-person assessment, it may impact on your performance.

Categories of circumstances are provided to help you identify which situations may typically meet the criteria.

Short-term medical conditions	Normally accepted
Serious short-term personal injury, medical condition or mental health condition	✓
An infectious disease which could be harmful if passed on to others	✓
Non-serious illness, injury or ailment (for example coughs, colds, headaches, hay fever) – unless symptoms are severe	x
Ongoing health conditions covered by a reasonable adjustment with no atypical flare-up.	x
Disabilities and/or long-term conditions	
Serious worsening or an acute episode of an ongoing disability, medical condition or mental health condition which cannot be accommodated by existing adjustments.	✓
Insufficient time to put Reasonable Adjustments (RAs) in place (and the student has disclosed a relevant condition at the earliest opportunity)	✓
Matters relating to gender reassignment, including time-off for medical appointments, surgery or attending counselling sessions	✓
Stable, established disabilities, medical conditions and mental health conditions where Reasonable Adjustments are in place	x
Bereavement	
Death of a close family member or friend	✓
Caring responsibilities	
Significant illness of a close family member or friend	✓
Unexpected caring responsibilities caused by unforeseen circumstances e.g. sudden serious illness or worsening of an ongoing medical or mental health condition of a close family member or a dependent.	✓
Direct and very recent experience of violent crime, war, terrorist incident or natural disaster by a child, sibling, parent, spouse or partner.	✓
Financial Problems	
General financial problems	x
Withdrawal of University IT systems because of non-payment of fees	x
Housing problems	
Serious and recent housing issues, such as your home becoming uninhabitable	✓
Sudden or unexpected eviction from housing	✓
Moving house	x
General housing problems	x
Personal Circumstances	
Significant personal crisis leading to acute stress	✓
Jury service (where deferral is not permitted by the Court)	✓
Holidays or planned trips to see family	x
Unforeseen representation at a sporting event (at least regional level)	✓
General domestic/family problems	x
Ongoing work commitments	x
Taking on extra shifts at work or not managing deadlines because of work commitment	x
Minor life events, unless the circumstances had a disproportionate impact	x
Religious observance	x
Visa issues	x
Circumstances that are reasonably foreseeable or prevented, such as intoxication, illegal activity, arrest, conviction	x

Significant work-related incident – for example redundancy	✓
Foreseeable, planned or minor transport disruption	x
Pregnancy & Maternity	
Serious complications in pregnancy and maternity	✓
Planned pregnancy or maternity where there are no complications. NOTE: students who are pregnant are entitled to reasonable adjustments and are advised to contact Student Advice & Guidance. You can contact them via the Student Centre .	x
Trauma	
Victim of violent crime (e.g. assault, mugging, sexual assault, rape, domestic violence)	✓
Witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident/crime	✓
Victim of petty theft e.g. mobile phone theft, bicycle theft (unless these involve mugging or assault, or an immediate impact on a student's ability to access time assessments e.g. theft of laptop within a remote examination window)	x
Major incidents	
Major national infrastructure issues, such as national grid blackouts	✓
Serious travel or other disruption (i.e. cancellation of all train services)	✓
Exceptional or severe weather conditions	✓
Study related	
General pressures, stress and/or anxiety about academic work	x
Assessments scheduled close together	x
Having more than one exam on the same day	x
Misreading the exam timetable	x
Lack of knowledge of University processes	x
Poor time management, including not meeting online assessment requirements	x
Failure of personal IT equipment/printers	x
Failure to back-up electronic documents	x
Submitting an incorrect or old file version of an assessment (after the deadline has passed)	x
Serious problems with academic project work e.g. obtaining ethical approval, equipment failure (which can be evidenced), problems with sample collection.	✓

Circumstances not usually covered by the EC Framework

Exceptional Circumstances are intended to cover circumstances that impact an individual student. You should notify your School if anything occurs that impacts a whole group of students on a module. Examples include:

- A technical or other issue with an Exam or other assessment
- A fire alarm activation during an exam requiring a prolonged evacuation
- A requirement for students to move out of a hall of residence for health and safety reasons immediately prior to an assessment period.
- Public health emergencies
- Industrial action

In such cases, the University will apply group mitigations and communicate the outcome to affected students.

5. When an EC claim might not be the solution

Sometimes, circumstances cannot be resolved quickly, or the support you need goes beyond what the University can reasonably provide. In these cases, you may need to consider interrupting your studies temporarily (taking temporary withdrawal). If this applies to you, please contact our support services who will be able to guide you through your options. You can contact them via the [Student Centre](#).

6. When to submit a claim

You must ensure that you submit your EC claim (and any required/requested evidence) as close to the assessment deadline or exam date as possible and no later than the published EC deadline.

EC deadlines take place throughout the year; these are published on the [EC webpage](#) on the Student Hub and on your Sussex Direct EC page (under the tab 'Study'). Check carefully as the deadlines are set according to your level of study, course and the assessment period in question e.g. A1, A2 or A3.

It is important that you meet these deadlines to ensure that your claim can be considered and processed in a timely way. Your EC claim will be rejected if it is submitted after the relevant deadline. Your EC claim may also be declined if you do not complete each step of the process or do not respond to requests for further information.

If you are unable to submit a claim by the published deadline you should refer to the [Academic Appeals](#) process.

7. What can you claim for?

When you are applying for exceptional circumstances, there are four different options you can claim for. You should select the option that is most relevant to your situation.

Late submission

If you have an exceptional circumstance that has resulted in your missing the original assessment deadline, but you have submitted or will submit within the late submission period (if this is provided), you should apply for late submission.

Not all assessments have a late submission period so you should check your individual assessments carefully.

If you raise a claim for late submission but do not submit during the late period or there is no permitted late submission period, your claim will automatically change to a claim for non-submission. This means you will see the status of your claim change from Late Submission to Non-submission in Sussex Direct.

Non-Submission

If you have exceptional circumstance that have resulted in you not submitting an assessment, you should apply for non-submission.

If you raise a claim for non-submission but then manage to submit your assignment during the late period (where this is permitted), you can request that your claim is changed to 'late' by emailing EC.Chair@sussex.ac.uk quoting your claim number and assessment details

If you raise a claim for non-submission but then submit your assignment by the published assessment deadline, you can request that your claim is changed to 'impairment' by emailing EC.Chair@sussex.ac.uk quoting your claim number and assessment details.

Non-attendance

If you have an exceptional circumstance that has resulted in you missing an in-person examination or practical assessment, you should apply for non-submission.

Impairment

If you have an exceptional circumstance that may impact how you have performed in an assessment or examination/practical and you believe that this may result in an unrepresentative mark, you should apply for impairment.

You cannot apply for impairment before you have submitted your assignment or taken an examination/practical. A claim for impairment can only be submitted after the examination or assessment deadline has passed and by the published EC deadline.

You should not wait to receive your marks before submitting an impairment claim. All claims must be submitted as close to the assessment deadline/date as possible.

8. Exceptional Circumstances and long-standing/chronic health conditions and Reasonable Adjustments (RAs)

A long-term condition does not meet the definition of an Exceptional Circumstance (EC), which is intended for short-term and/or unexpected circumstances. It is recommended that students with such conditions register with Disability Advice. You might be entitled to a range of support called Reasonable Adjustments (RAs), that can help you keep on top of your studies such as extra time in exams, late penalty waivers (where an assessment permits) and in certain circumstances, mentoring support. You might also be able to apply for extensions.

For more information, please visit '[Reasonable adjustments for your studies](#)' or contact Student Advice and Guidance if you have any questions about your reasonable adjustments. You can contact them via the [Student Centre](#).

However, you can still submit an EC Claim in the following circumstances:

- a) Where you are experiencing an atypical flare-up, fluctuation or deterioration in your ongoing condition meaning that all adjustments that have been put in place are no longer sufficient at this stage.

- b) There is a temporary issue in the implementation/presence of your reasonable adjustment so temporary measures are required.
- c) You experience an EC circumstance that is unrelated to your disability/reasonable adjustment.

See section 11 for further information on the use of self-certification in any of these circumstances.

9. How to submit a claim

It is up to individual students to decide what information or evidence to include in your claim. See section 17 if you need any help in making a claim.

You should submit an EC claim directly to the University via your Sussex Direct Account. Once you have logged-in select the 'Study' tab and then the 'Exceptional Circumstance' tab.

When making a claim, please provide sufficient information on the exceptional circumstances claim form so that we can fully understand your circumstances and how they have impacted you.

After you submit your claim, you will get an automatic email to confirm we've received it. If you don't get this email, please check that you clicked 'submit' and that your claim isn't still saved as a draft.

10. Evidence to support your claim

You are required to upload evidence as part of your claim. If your evidence is a letter or email, this should be from someone who knows you in a professional capacity and who can independently verify the circumstances that you detail in your claim. Evidence should be robust, must be dated and correspond with the assessment date/s in question, where appropriate.

Examples of the types of evidence that could be accepted are listed below. Please note that the list is not exhaustive and it provides just some of the examples that may be appropriate.

A short-term medical condition	An atypical flare-up of an ongoing illness or disability	Bereavement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-certification • Medical certificate • Hospital discharge letter • Hospital or surgery appointment letter/email (<i>indicating that the appointment cannot be re-scheduled</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-certification • Professional letter from Student Advice and Guidance • Medical letter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-certification • An obituary • A dated funeral order of service • A death certificate

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter/note from a relevant health care professional • Letter/email from the Exams and Assessment team confirming illness during an examination. 		
Unexpected Caring responsibilities	Witnessing a traumatic event	Housing problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-certification • Medical evidence of impact, e.g. letter from a doctor or medical practitioner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-certification • Police/crime statement • Court/tribunal letter • News article (respectable sources only) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-certification • Written evidence from official housing provider or local council, care or support worker • Home eviction notice • Notice to quit
Jury Service	Unforeseen representation at a sport event (at least regional level)	Work related
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A letter from the Court or tribunal including the dates of the legal proceedings, and confirming that you could not be excused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A letter of confirmation from the relevant organising body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written evidence of redundancy/termination of employment.

We aim to take a pragmatic approach and reduce the burden on students wherever possible:

- Original copies are not usually required – screenshots or photos of original documents are acceptable. **IMPORTANT:** You must not upload graphic images such as body parts or injury. These do not meet the above evidential requirements
- We may request additional evidence if the information provided is incomplete or unclear.

Important Requirements:

- Evidence must be in English or provided by a certified translator.
- Any confidential third-party evidence must include written permission from the individuals named in the documentation.
- If you cannot provide translated evidence, you may wish to consider self-certification (see Section 11).
- Wherever possible evidence should include a date or dates so it is clear that there is a link with the assessment/circumstances impacted.

11. Self-certification

We understand that in some situations it can be difficult or disproportionate to provide evidence for your EC claim. In line with workplace practice, the University allows self-certification in certain circumstances.

Key Criteria:

- You may submit a self-certificate on up to two occasions per academic year. For further occasions, alternative evidence will usually be required (see section 10).
- Each self-certification can cover a maximum of seven (7) calendar days. For day eight and beyond, additional self-certification or evidence will be required.
- Self-certification can be used for all outcomes permitted under the EC process, where your claim is accepted. (See section on long-term conditions.)

Self-certification and students registered with Disability Advice

If you are a student registered with a disability, you can use self-certification to support an EC claim if you:

- a) Are experiencing an atypical flare-up, fluctuation or deterioration in your ongoing condition meaning that all adjustments that have been put in place are no longer sufficient at this stage.
- b) Or there is a temporary issue in the implementation/presence of your Reasonable Adjustment (RA) so temporary measures are required.

If self-certification is used in either of these circumstances, it will not count towards your two-occasion limit within an academic year.

Self-certification and students experiencing a bereavement

If you have experienced a recent bereavement of a close family member or friend, you may use self-certification for your EC claim. In this situation, the self-certification will not normally count towards your two-occasion limit within an academic year.

12. Confidentiality of your claim

We understand that the information you provide in your EC claim may be sensitive and personal. Information disclosed as part of an EC claim will be processed and handled in accordance with the University's [Data Protection Policy](#) and [Privacy Notice](#).

Once submitted, your claim will be reviewed by specially trained staff and handled in strictest confidence. However, some details may need to be shared with relevant University staff to ensure that you are fully supported.

For example,

- If your claim suggests you might be eligible to receive Reasonable Adjustments, we will refer you to Disability Advice
- If we have serious concerns about your welfare, we may ask one of our specialist teams to contact you directly to offer support.

- If we are concerned that you might be struggling academically (i.e. in light of multiple claims or claims for multiple assessments), we may ask your School Student Experience team (or equivalent) to reach out to you

Our priority is to treat your information with care while ensuring you receive any help you may need.

13. Checklist

To make the process as simple as possible, please check the following before submitting your claim:

Checklist
• Does your reason meet the Sussex definition of exceptional circumstances? (see section 3)
• Are you within the application window for EC claims? (see section 6)
• Have you submitted your claim against the correct module and assessment(s)?
• Have you chosen the correct type of claim? (see section 7)
• Have you clearly explained your circumstances and how they directly impact the assessments you are claiming for?
• Can you use self-certification? (see section 11)
• If you have already submitted two self-certified claims this year, have you gathered evidence for your new claim? (see section 10)

If you answered **YES** to all of the above, you are ready to submit your EC claim via Sussex Direct.

If you answered **NO** to any, or are unsure, please gather the necessary information before submitting or seek advice from the Student Centre or the Students' Union (see section 17).

Important: Failure to follow the procedure or missing information may result in your claim being rejected.

14. Fraudulent claims and falsification/fabrication of evidence

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](#).

15. I've submitted an EC claim, but I would like to withdraw it from consideration

We cannot withdraw your claim, but you can delete it on your EC page on Sussex Direct. If you delete your claim before the deadline date, it will be removed from your record. If you delete your claim after the relevant deadline date, we may not be able to prevent your EC being referred to the relevant examination board.

16. I've submitted my claim – what happens next?

Your claim will be considered in accordance with the Exceptional Circumstances Framework and this procedural guide. There are three key stages:

Stage 1: The Assessment Stage

A trained member of University staff will review your claim and any accompanying evidence to see if it meets the criteria detailed in the EC Framework. You will be informed if your claim has been accepted, declined or if more evidence is needed. All notifications are sent to your Sussex email account only so please do check it regularly.

An EC claim that is 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 your request has been upheld or not upheld.

Stage 2: Outcome stage

At stage 2, an accepted EC Claim for late submission will result in the removal of any late penalty. You can view this on your Module Results page on Sussex Direct once you receive your marks and feedback. It will appear as 'XNS' which means excused non-submission.

Any accepted EC claims that relate to non-submission, non-attendance or impairment will be notified to the relevant examination board. The board will make an academic judgement in relation to each EC claim(s), informed by your overall performance and determine whether an academic outcome can be given. The details of your exceptional circumstance will not be disclosed to the examination board other than that you have an approved EC claim (see stage 1).

If the exam board have agreed an outcome (e.g. the offer of an option uncapped sit) this information will be available to you when your stage results are formally published (usually at the end of the academic year). You will not be notified if the exam board have not offered you an outcome and you can contact your school to find out more about the reason for any decision made.

Any decision made by the exam board must be made in accordance with the University's Progression and Award regulations. Permitted outcomes are as follows:

- The offer of an optional uncapped sit (usually only offered if your assessment mark is not in line with your other marks)
- A compulsory uncapped sit.

Examples of outcomes that are not permitted are as follows:

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 change in an assessment mark
- Reclassification of an award
- The setting aside of marks

Stage 3: Appeal stage

In the event that you are dissatisfied with the outcome of either stage 1 or stage 2, you can submit an appeal subject to the [Academic Appeals procedure](#) and timeframes.

17. Sources of advice and further information

If you need more help and advice about making an exceptional circumstances claim you can contact:

The Student Centre: <https://student.sussex.ac.uk/centre/>

The Students' Union support and advocacy service: <https://sussexstudent.com/support>

Exceptional Circumstances: <https://student.sussex.ac.uk/assessment/exceptional-circumstances>

If your exceptional circumstance relates to you being assaulted, abused or targeted and you would like support or advice, you can tell us about your incident by letting us know using [Report + Support](#) – the University's online tool for recording and responding to these behaviours.