

## **Exceptional Circumstances**

### **Procedural Guide**

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## **1. Who is this guidance for?**

This procedural document is to guide users with the Exceptional Circumstances (EC) process, as outlined in the EC policy.

This guidance document on EC is for any taught student (undergraduate / postgraduate) who is undertaking a University of Sussex assessment which is credit bearing / weighted. Research students should contact their supervisor in the first instance. See section 3 of the EC Policy for specific guidance for students who are studying abroad, are visiting and exchange students hosted by the University or on a placement.

This procedural document should be read in conjunction with the Exceptional Circumstances (EC) policy. Details about the EC policy and this procedural guide are located on the EC [webpages](#).

## **2. Supporting you through your studies**

The EC procedure helps a student to receive additional consideration, relating to their assessment/s, if they are experiencing circumstances that have impacted them negatively. We strongly encourage you to contact the University's support services about your support needs, as soon as you know that you may have a problem. This allows us to support you during such circumstances and look at a range of options that may have a positive impact, which may or may not include the EC process. Details about help and support at the University can be located on this [webpage](#).

## **3. What is an Exceptional Circumstance (EC)?**

An Exceptional Circumstance is a circumstance that has negatively impacted you to study/prepare/complete an assessment or exam which is determined by the University as reasonably:

- a) short-term;
- b) arisen unexpectedly; and
- c) beyond the student's control.

All parts of this definition must be met for a claim to be pursued via the EC process.

The University takes into account the impact/effects experienced on the module-assessment when considering claims.

#### **4. What situations could EC help with?**

There are specific situations where an EC claim can be used. These are:

- a) **LATE SUBMISSION:** you do not submit an assessment by the published deadline, but subsequently submit during a late submission period (if provided)<sup>1</sup>
- b) **NON-SUBMISSION:** you do not submit an assessment during an assessment period.
- c) **NON-ATTENDANCE:** you are absent from a scheduled in-person examination or practical assessment.
- d) **IMPAIRMENT:** you consider your academic performance to be seriously impaired and will result in an unrepresentative mark.

You cannot submit a claim for:

- a) Multiple considerations, for example late and impairment.
- b) Declaring impairment prior to an exam or assessment deadline. An impairment claim must be submitted after the examination or assessment deadline in question and prior to any published EC deadline. This is because it is usual for EC circumstances to arise around the assessment not in advance.

If you raise a late submission claim but do not submit during the late period we will update the status of your claim automatically. This means you will see the status of your claim change from Late Submission to Non-Submission in Sussex Direct.

If you raise a claim for Non-Submission but then send in your assignment during the late period, we will update the status of your claim automatically. This means you will see the status of your claim change from Non-Submission to Late submission in Sussex Direct.

#### **5. Circumstances likely/unlikely to be accepted**

The content of Table A below is indicative and not exhaustive. It is challenging to prescribe all scenarios and therefore the University reserves a level of case-by-case judgement.

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<sup>1</sup> Not all assessments have a late submission period so students must check their individual assessments carefully.

**Table A**

Examples of circumstances likely to be accepted	Examples of circumstances likely to be excluded.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious short-term illness / injury / ailment</li> <li>• Atypical flare-up of an ongoing illness/disability<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Infectious disease which could be harmful if passed on to others</li> <li>• Death or significant illness of a close family member or friend</li> <li>• Unexpected caring responsibilities for a family member/dependent</li> <li>• Significant personal crisis leading to acute stress</li> <li>• Witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident/crime</li> <li>• Accommodation crisis such as your home becoming uninhabitable</li> <li>• Jury service (where deferral not permitted by the Court)</li> <li>• Unforeseen representation at a sport event (at least regional level)</li> <li>• Major national infrastructure issues, such as national grid blackout.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-serious illness / injury / ailment, unless symptoms are severe (i.e. a cold/short lived virus)</li> <li>• Holidays, house moves or other events/affairs that were planned or could reasonably have been expected</li> <li>• Foreseeable, planned or minor transport disruption</li> <li>• Assessments scheduled close together</li> <li>• Misreading the exam timetable or lack of knowledge of university processes</li> <li>• Poor time-management, including not meeting online assessment requirements or planning.</li> <li>• Personal computer or other IT issues/failures. Students should have taken adequate precautionary measures, planned and/or checked compatibility.</li> <li>• General pressures, stress and/or anxiety from academic work</li> <li>• Employment commitments</li> <li>• Minor life events, unless circumstance had a disproportionate impact.</li> <li>• Religious observance</li> <li>• Circumstances that are reasonably foreseeable or prevented, such as intoxication, convictions/illegal activity</li> <li>• Visa issues</li> <li>• Employment / financial issues.</li> <li>• Ongoing health conditions in receipt of reasonable adjustments with no atypical flare-up,</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> See section 6 below also.

Where your circumstances cannot be resolved quickly or the support you need is beyond what our support services can reasonably provide, you may need to consider interrupting your studies. In such circumstances, please contact our support services who will be able to guide you through your options. How to contact them can be found via this [webpage](#).

You may wish to consider alternative options if your circumstances are unlikely to be accepted, for example your situation does not meet the EC definition. It may be possible for you to defer assessments instead, subject to specified criteria. Details and guidance regarding deferring assessments are located via this [webpage](#).

## 6. ECs and longstanding/chronic health conditions

The reasonable adjustment process is in place to ensure that disabled students are able to learn and be assessed on a level playing field. It should not normally be necessary for a student to use the EC process in addition to receiving reasonable adjustments. The definition of a long-term condition would not usually meet the definition of EC (i.e. being short-term and/or unexpected).

Your reasonable adjustments should be able to support you and your disability during your studies long-term. If you are in receipt of reasonable adjustments, you are eligible to seek extensions to your assessment submissions through your reasonable adjustments. Further details about applying for extensions are located via this [weblink](#).

There are circumstances that may require you to need support from both reasonable adjustments and the EC process. These are:

- a) You are experiencing an atypical flare-up, fluctuation or deterioration in your ongoing condition meaning that all adjustments in place are no longer sufficient at this stage.<sup>4</sup>
- b) There is a temporary issue in the implementation/presence of your reasonable adjustments so temporary measures are required.<sup>5</sup>
- c) You experience an EC circumstance that is unrelated to your disability/reasonable adjustments.

The Disability Team are here to support and work with you to ensure support arrangements are as effective as possible. We strongly encourage students to speak

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<sup>3</sup> See section 6 for further details.

<sup>4</sup> See section 8.

<sup>5</sup> See section 8.

to this team throughout their studies as they can ensure adjustments are most effective and reduce the likelihood of requiring ECs. Their contact details are located via this [webpage](#).

For (a) and (b) above, self-certification is permitted and will not count towards your two self-certification limit per academic year. For (c) above, self-certification can be used but will count towards your two self-certification limit per academic year. An EC claim may be unsuccessful if a student is able to seek a remedy, or is already in receipt of a remedy for their circumstances, through alternative mechanism (such as an extension request through reasonable adjustments).

## 7. Evidence likely/unlikely to be accepted

The content of table B below is indicative and not exhaustive. It is challenging to prescribe all types of evidence and therefore the University reserves a level of case-by-case judgement.

You should supply evidence that is best to support the details you are describing. Evidence from an independent and authoritative individual/source is desirable.

**Table B**

Examples of evidence likely acceptable to use	Examples of evidence likely to be excluded.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-certification form</li> <li>• Medical certificate or letter</li> <li>• Letter from a registered counsellor</li> <li>• Letter from a professional best placed to corroborate matters being considered (e.g. Student Advisor or Disability Advisor)</li> <li>• Hospital admission report / appointment letter</li> <li>• Police/crime statement</li> <li>• Court / Tribunal letter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Photographs</li> <li>• Documentation without a date or dates corresponding with the assessment/circumstances impacted</li> <li>• No medical evidence to support medical declaration</li> </ul>

## 8. When is self-certification accepted?

The University recognises that there are circumstances that are challenging to provide evidence for and also would not be proportionate to do so. This is reflective of practices in the workplace. Consequently, self-certification will be acceptable in certain circumstances. Self-certification is permitted under the following criteria:

- a) A student may only 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-certification can only cover a maximum of a seven [7] day period (calendar days). A further self-certification or evidence will be required for day eight [8] and beyond.
- c) Self-certification can be used for all requested outcomes permitted under the EC process, where a claim is accepted. See section 6 above.

The University reserves the right to accept a greater level of self-certification and other forms of evidence, in addition to self-certification, where deemed appropriate.

Students with a disability who submit an EC claim under 6(a) and (b) above can use self-certification. When used for these two circumstances, the use of self-certification will not count towards your two-occasion limit within an academic year.

A student who is experiencing a bereavement of a close family-member/friend, can use self-certification. Such use of self-certification will not usually count towards your two-occasion limit within an academic year.

## 9. Example scenarios and evidence

As a guide, Table C below provides example circumstances and evidence likely to be accepted.

**Table C**

Example circumstances likely to be accepted	Examples of evidence likely to be accepted.
Serious short-term illness / injury / ailment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-certification</li> <li>• Medical certificate</li> <li>• Hospital discharge letter</li> <li>• Letter from the Exams and Assessment Team confirming illness during an assessment.</li> </ul>
Atypical flare-up of an ongoing illness/disability <sup>6</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-certification</li> <li>• Professional letter from the Disability Team</li> <li>• Medical letter</li> </ul>
Death or significant illness of a close family member or friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-certification</li> <li>• Death certificate</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> See [6] below also.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Order of service</li> </ul>
Witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident/crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-certification</li> <li>• Police/crime statement</li> <li>• Court / Tribunal letter</li> <li>• News article (respectable source)</li> </ul>
Jury Service (where deferral not permitted by the Court)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A letter from the Court or Tribunal including the dates of the legal proceedings, and confirming that you could not be excused.</li> </ul>
Unforeseen representation at a sport event (at least regional level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A letter of confirmation from the relevant organising body</li> </ul>

## 10. Time Limits for an EC Claim

You must ensure that you submit an EC (and any required/requested evidence) by the published EC deadline.

EC deadlines will take place throughout the year. Each term will have an overall deadline for claims for any assessment taking place during the associated term/assessment period. You are required to comply with any deadlines that are set according to your study level, course and the assessment period in question, i.e. A1 / A2 / A3.

All deadlines are published on the EC webpage located on this [webpage](#).

It is important that you meet these deadlines. Your EC claim will be declined if it is not received by the relevant EC deadline. Your EC claim can be declined if all steps/requests are not completed or met.

## 11. How to submit an EC Claim

You submit an EC claim directly to the University by:

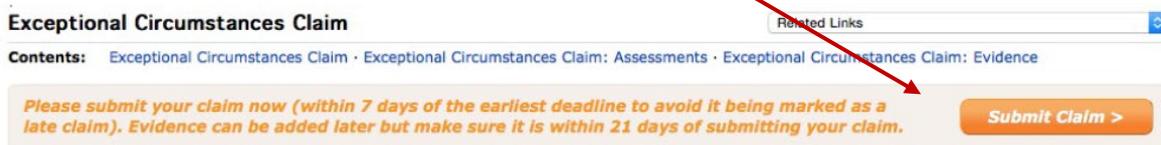
- Logging into [SussexDirect](#). You will need to log-in using your Sussex university username and password.
- Select 'Study' and click 'Exceptional Circumstances' from the drop-down menu.
- Select 'new claim' to begin drafting your EC claim.

When you are drafting your EC Claim you will be given the opportunity to:

- Describe the circumstances that you are experiencing
- Select which assessment/s you believe have been impacted

- Confirm what type of EC claim you are applying for (see section 4 above for details)
- Provide evidence (including uploading self-certification if being used). Please note, you cannot submit a claim without uploading any evidence/self-certification.
- Review your claim before submitting
- Submit for University consideration. **Important: students must ensure they click the orange 'submit claim' icon in order for your claim to be considered, see image 1 below.**

Image 1



If you raise a late submission claim but do not submit during the late period we will update the status of your claim automatically. This means you will see the status of your claim change from Late Submission to Non-Submission in Sussex Direct.

If you raise a claim for Non-Submission but then send in your assignment during the late period, we will update the status of your claim automatically. This means you will see the status of your claim change from Non-Submission to Late submission in Sussex Direct.

## 12. What happens with my EC claim when submitted?

Your claim will be considered in accordance with the EC policy, this guide and the accompanying webpages.

### Stage 1

At stage 1 (the assessment stage), a trained member of university staff will review your claim and accompanying evidence. They will determine if the claim can be pursued. The outcomes at this assessment stage are:

- a) Claim accepted: your EC claim meets the criteria and will now progress to an examination board for further consideration. If you have applied for the removal of the late-penalty then this will be removed immediately.
- b) Claim not accepted: your EC claim does not meet the criteria of the EC policy and cannot be pursued. Alternatively, you have not provided all the information required on-time for a decision to be made.
- c) Further information required: the University requires you to provide further

information for your EC claim to be considered further. You can upload further evidence to your EC claim via Sussex Direct.

At stage 1, you will receive updates via email and also on SussexDirect. You are advised to review both regularly for updates.

The University aims to provide an initial decision on your EC claim within 15 working days, at stage 1.

### **Stage 2**

At stage 2 (outcome stage), any claim accepted at Stage 1 is sent to the relevant examination board to be considered further. The board will make an academic judgement in relation to each EC claim, informed by your overall performance and determine what academic outcome is to be provided to you, if any. You will receive an update on the examination board's decision on your respective results day.

It is important to note that examination boards operate anonymously and do not see the nature of the EC disclosed. They note that an EC claim has been accepted (see stage 1) and consider the impact on the assessment.

### **Stage 3**

In the event that you are dissatisfied with the outcome of either Stage 1 or 2, you can submit an appeal subject to the academic appeals procedures and timeframes. Details about the Appeals process can be found on the [Student Hub](#).

## **13. Possible EC claim outcomes**

Table D below provides an outline of possible outcomes to an EC claim. You should note that this is indicative and any academic remedy is at the discretion of the examination board, subject to the University's academic regulations.

**Table D**

EC Claim Status	Typical outcome/s
Your EC Claim is not accepted	No additional consideration will be provided as your claim does not meet the EC criteria <b>OR</b> You have not provided all the information required/requested to make a decision before the deadline.
Your EC claim requires further information	The University has not made a decision on your claim yet. We require further information to make a decision and

	require this within the timeframe specified and before the deadline (whichever is sooner).
Your EC Claim is accepted	Your EC claim is accepted and either: a) If applied for late, your late-penalty will be removed <b>AND/OR</b> b) You claim will be forwarded to your examination board for further consideration.
Your EC Claim progresses to an examination board for further consideration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No further remedy as the board have applied academic judgement that your marks are not out of line, when considering your performance overall.</li> <li>You are provided a further opportunity to take your assessment at a future point, without a cap on marks (called a sit).</li> <li>You are offered the option to repeat the module/year</li> </ul>

It is important to note that should your EC claim be accepted, this may have an impact on your progression to the next stage of your course, or to the conferment of your award and the timing of your subsequent graduation.

#### 14. Responding to EC Claims

The details referenced as part of your EC claim/s could indicate that you may need additional support. For example, where frequent claims are made signposting to further guidance or to the Disability Team may be appropriate. Consequently, University services (support and/or academic schools) may receive notifications about the circumstances you have disclosed and contact you directly. The purpose of such contact is to discuss how we can best support you whilst you study. This can include discussing your attendance, wellbeing, academic engagement and achievement, and/or any safeguarding/legal responsibilities (if applicable) that may arise.

Disclosing sensitive/personal information can be difficult and challenging. As such, we want to reassure you that all details disclosed will be treated professionally, confidentially and sensitively. The University is here to support you and this information will help us to support you during this time and your studies.

In certain circumstances, the University may consider the information you have

disclosed via alternative process/procedure where this is appropriate, for example Fitness to Study or Reasonable Adjustment processes.

<b>Review / Contacts / References</b>	
Policy title:	Exceptional Circumstances Procedural Guide
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Approving body:	UEC
Last review date:	November 2023
Revision history:	1
Next review date:	June 2024
Related internal policies, procedures, guidance:	<a href="https://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/examsandassessment">https://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/examsandassessment</a> <a href="https://student.sussex.ac.uk/assessment/exceptional-circumstances">https://student.sussex.ac.uk/assessment/exceptional-circumstances</a>
Policy owner:	<i>Student Experience / CCF</i>
Lead contact /	<i>Head of Complaints, Conduct and Funding</i>

author:	
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