

Exceptional Circumstances Policy

1. Overview and Purpose

- 1.1. This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Exceptional Circumstances (EC) Procedural Guide. Details regarding the EC policy and procedural guide can be located on the EC [webpages](#).
- 1.2. The purpose of this policy is to outline how the University will take into account circumstances that impact a student's academic performance, that fall within the parameters of exceptional circumstances. For example, a student may suddenly become ill with a serious short-term illness.
- 1.3. The EC framework is in place to ensure that all students are given a fair and equal opportunity to demonstrate academic achievement. It is the objective of the EC process to ensure that academic standards are not compromised but to permit fair opportunity for students to reach standards, whilst they overcome temporary detriment/s.
- 1.4. Circumstances that fall outside the scope of EC should be considered through alternative mechanisms, for example reasonable adjustments.

2. Definition

- 2.1. An Exceptional Circumstance is a circumstance that has negatively impacted a student's ability 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.
- 2.2. All parts of [2.1] must be met for a claim to be pursued via the EC process. The University's decision on whether a circumstance meets this definition is final. The decision-making process is outlined in this policy and accompanying procedural guide.
- 2.3. The University will take into account the impact/effects experienced on the module-assessment when considering claims.

3. Eligibility

- 3.1. Registered taught undergraduate/postgraduate students are eligible to submit an EC claim. An EC claim can be pursued for any University of Sussex assessment/s that is credit bearing/weighted.

- 3.2. University of Sussex students who are studying abroad are not permitted to use the EC process for assessments concerning their host institution and should use the equivalent host institution's procedures. Any opportunity to retake an assessment should, where possible, occur during their period of study at their host institution. Where a student is having difficulty resolving matters, they should seek advice from the [Sussex Abroad Office](#).
- 3.3. Students not registered on a university award (e.g. hosted students) may pursue an EC claim for their Sussex assessment/s, in line with this Policy and associated procedural guide.
- 3.4. Students on a placement should use the sickness reporting systems in place at their employer/placement facilitator. They must also notify their [Academic School](#) if absent for six consecutive days or more. An EC claim can only be submitted regarding the submission of a student's respective placement portfolio/project, with claims for non-submission or late EC submission permitted only.
- 3.5. Research students should contact their supervisor in the first instance.

4. EC Scenarios

- 4.1. It is challenging to prescribe all scenarios for this area. Therefore, the University reserves a level of discretion and case-by-case judgment when determining if an EC claim meets the definition and process requirements. The University takes into account the impact/effects experienced on the module-assessment when considering claims.
- 4.2. The accompanying procedural guide will outline a range of example circumstances that are likely to be accepted/not accepted.
- 4.3. Reasonable adjustments should ensure that disabled students are able to learn and be assessed on a level playing field with their fellow students. Where reasonable adjustments are in place, it should not normally be necessary for a student to use the EC process. The accompanying procedural guidance will outline circumstances where the EC process may be required nonetheless. 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.
- 4.4. Further, the EC process is in place for individual student circumstances. It is not typically required for 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 EC claims. Guidance

will be provided when such circumstances take place.

5. Evidence

- 5.1. It is reasonable for the University to request evidence to support EC claims. Required evidence should be proportionate to the situation being described. Any evidence must be dated and correspond with the assessment date/s in question, where appropriate.
- 5.2. The accompanying procedural guide will outline the type of evidence which are likely to be accepted/not accepted.
- 5.3. 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 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 7 below.
- 5.4. The University reserves the right to accept a greater level of self-certification and other forms of evidence, in addition to self-certification, where deemed appropriate. The procedural guidance will provide further details on potential circumstances where this will usually occur.

6. Timeframes

- 6.1. All EC claims are required to be submitted (including any requested evidence) in a timely manner and before the applicable deadline/s. This is to ensure that any accepted claims can be considered on time by decision-makers and seeks to minimise any delay to progression or award decisions.
- 6.2. Students are advised to submit an EC claim at the earliest opportunity, close to the assessment deadline/s of concern and by the applicable deadline. This

is because evidence, recollection and support for the matters disclosed are more easily available.

- 6.3. 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. Students are required to comply with deadlines that are set according to their study level, course and the assessment period in question, i.e. A1 / A2 / A3.
- 6.4. The University will publish deadlines on the EC dedicated [webpages](#).
- 6.5. Students are responsible for meeting any requests made to assess an EC claim, including meeting any specified timeframes. An EC claim can be declined if all steps/requests are not completed or met. Alternative mechanisms (subject to their rules) may need to be explored by a student if the deadline has passed, such as the [academic appeals](#) process.

7. Types of EC Claims

7.1. The following types of EC 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.

b) Non-submission/absence

This is when a student is absent from attending an assessment or does not submit their assessment-work due to the circumstances they have experienced. A student will ordinarily receive a zero mark when this occurs.

c) Impaired

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

7.2. Students submitting a late submission claim are seeking the removal of the late-penalty, where permitted and an EC claim is accepted. For all other accepted claims, students are requesting their examination boards to take into

account their claim (if accepted) in conjunction with their wider academic performance. An examination board may decide to award an academic remedy in response. For example, an uncapped resit opportunity.

8. EC Process

- 8.1. It is the responsibility of all students to notify the University of their circumstances and to submit an EC claim. The accompanying procedural guide provides guidance to students on how to submit an EC claim for consideration. Exceptionally, the University may assign an EC claim on behalf of a student.
- 8.2. The University will ensure that all decision-making is guided by fairness, compassion, context, fact and evidence.
- 8.3. Students must ensure that an EC claims contains all the required information and evidence they wish to be considered as part of the decision-making process. University decisions are typically made solely on the information provided in the claim submitted.
- 8.4. The EC process will consist of three stages. These are:

- a) Stage 1: Assessment Stage

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

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

All accepted EC claims will be cascaded to the applicable examination board for consideration.¹ The examination board will make an academic judgement in relation to each EC claim, informed by the student's overall performance and determines what academic outcome is to be provided to a student, if any.

¹ 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.

For accepted EC claims, the examination boards permits the Stage 1 process to remove any late penalties that are applied, where present. All other outcomes/claims must be cascaded to Stage 2 for decision.

An examination board is under no obligation to provide a remedy where an EC claim is present. All outcomes are determined in accordance with the University's progression and award regulations.

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 comply with any requirements specified, for example submitting an appeal during their specified appeal window.

- 8.5. The accompanying procedural guide outlines typical outcomes that can be awarded as part of the EC process.
- 8.6. Students who have exhausted the University's internal procedures will be issued with a completion of procedures letter and informed that they may make a complaint to the OIA. The OIA's website (www.oiahe.org.uk) contains full details of the scheme.

9. Disclosure and Support

- 9.1. Details referenced as part of the EC process could indicate that additional support maybe needed. University services (support and/or academic schools) may contact students in regards to the circumstances they have disclosed in their EC 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 may refer a student to alternative process/procedure where appropriate, for example fitness to study or reasonable adjustment processes.
- 9.2. 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 policies, procedures and privacy notice/s.
- 9.3. The University may need to take into account any previous EC claim/s when considering a current claim.
- 9.4. The University reserves the right to determine which policy/procedures are utilised to respond to circumstances disclosed as part of EC process, for example fitness to study or academic appeal procedures.

10. Oversight and Reporting

- 10.1. The University's Education Committee is responsible for overseeing this Policy and accompanying procedural guide.
- 10.2. The Student Experience Division will produce an annual report on EC claims. This will detail the number of claims received and appropriately anonymised analytical-data for development and process enhancement purposes.
- 10.3. Academic School Staff will report to their School Student Progress Committee on one-to-one review meetings held, in light of EC claims requiring follow-up activity.

Review / Contacts / References	
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Related internal policies, procedures, guidance:	https://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/examsandassessment https://student.sussex.ac.uk/assessment/exceptional-circumstances
Policy owner:	<i>Student Experience / CCF</i>
Lead contact / author:	<i>Head of Complaints, Conduct and Funding</i>