

Procedural Guidance

Staff involved with any part of the Exceptional Circumstances procedure should be familiar with both the Policy and Procedure and also the Student Guidance. This is important to ensure we provide students complete and accurate advice. Please also have a look at the information and resources located on the [Health & wellbeing webpages](#) for details of the support services available to all students.

Every attempt should be made to ensure that students are aware of the Exceptional Circumstances procedure and follow the requirement to raise the issues as early as possible so we can sign post to appropriate support with an aim of reducing the overall impact on the student's study.

Accessing other relevant BU documents

All documents can be accessed [here](#)

For academic year 2021/22 - Specific guidance relating to Covid-19

If a student or a member of their household has a suspected or positive case of Covid-19 which results in them needing to self-isolate they should be advised to continue engaging with their studies online. Students should refer to the latest [government guidance](#) on circumstances in which they might be required to self-isolate.

If a student reports being impacted by being unwell with Covid-19 or caring for a member of their household due to Covid-19, or for another reason related to the Covid-19 situation (e.g. unexpected IT issues due to working from home) reports that the situation has impacted on their ability to study or complete an assessment, they should be advised to utilise the standard form (extension or Board consideration request form).

If a student's circumstance is Covid-19 related, they will need to submit evidence of a positive Covid-19 test result.

Students can self-certify for illness for up to 5 days without any evidence requirement.

Standard Procedural Guidance

1. Operational guidance and minimum requirements

The following additional guidance has been written to further assist with the operational elements of the Exceptional Circumstances procedure. It provides both recommendations in order to meet the expected minimum requirements in accordance with policy and also some additional questions and prompts that may assist Faculties when planning for and running the Circumstances procedure throughout the year.

Recommendations for meeting Minimum Requirements

It is recommended that Faculties agree generic communication/ templates in relation to circumstances at the start of the academic year. This may be at Faculty, Department or Programme level. (An example is available in the appendix).

Students must be advised of the last deadline to request extensions - the deadlines around submission points should be carefully considered and planned for so that dates can be advertised on the brief (if possible) the VLE and via email. The Procedure states that extensions/ postponements may be granted if the request is submitted before the assessment deadline/ exam.

All requests must be logged and the outcome recorded, even where the request is rejected or the form is returned to the student due to missing information (including evidence if required).

Records should be utilised to inform Faculty members of the instances of submission and their outcomes (including reasons for the decision), and may be used to identify trends through reporting. The Faculty may wish to monitor the number of times an individual submits Exceptional Circumstances requests as this could indicate a longer-term issue.

As all circumstance requests need to be reviewed on an individual basis Faculties may wish to discuss the logistical arrangements/ timings for this to take place throughout the year and agree deadlines with the relevant Programme Leaders and Programme Support staff.

Students are advised to expect a response within 5 working days of a submission. This may be to inform them of the outcome or to confirm the next steps (including setting expectation of when their outcome may be received). See below regarding requirements for communication with students.

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Incomplete forms or those submitted without evidence (where required) should normally be returned to the student without consideration. If there is time for them to re-visit and return within the deadline this should be communicated to the student.

Students may self-certificate (for illness up to 5 days) by using the standard extension request form. Any implications of self-certifying absence from exams or assessments should be explained clearly to students (e.g. knock-on impact for their schedule of assessment), with requests being monitored for the purpose of staff intervention if there is a suspicion of misuse. Student suspected of misuse should be referred to sources of further pastoral or academic support, or in serious cases may be referred to '11K – Student Disciplinary Procedure'.

Extensions are granted based on the nature of the assignment and the impact of the circumstances and would normally range from 2-3 days to 2 weeks.

Exams are normally postponed until the next reassessment opportunity.

Requests for Board consideration and extensions should be processed as quickly as possible. Students must be notified if their request has been referred on and advised of what will happen next and when they should expect to hear back.

Exceptional Circumstances Boards should be convened in accordance with its Terms of Reference.

If rejected or returned, students should be notified in writing as quickly as possible and guidance provided on what they should do next. Students must also be informed of why their request was rejected.

All outcomes must be communicated to students in a timely manner and provide information about what will happen next and sign-post to relevant support services. Students should also have the opportunity to discuss the outcome and the impact on their assessments with an Academic Advisor if further advice is needed.

Consideration of Requests

All requests will be considered on an individual case by case basis.

Requests should only be rejected based on the following criteria:

1. Does not meet policy definition of Exceptional Circumstances
2. Incomplete form
3. Insufficient evidence or evidence does not support the claim (note: evidence may not always be available/required)
4. Factors determine that the case should be considered under another procedure e.g. Support to Study or Fitness to Practice

Requests for Assessment Board consideration of exceptional circumstance should not normally be rejected because the student has passed the assessment concerned, but it should be explained to the student that the mark for the next attempt would stand, whether higher or lower than the previous attempt (see '6L – Assessment Board Decision Making: Procedure' paragraph 6.9.21)

We would normally expect requests to meet all of the criteria outlined in the definition of Exceptional Circumstances (within the Policy). However, there will be some cases where not all points are evident but the Exceptional Circumstances procedure is considered the most appropriate way of dealing with the student's situation.

Evidence submitted to support a Board Consideration or Extension request should be taken at face value and accepted unless there is good reason not to do so. Where a student is dealing with serious circumstances that are very likely to have had an impact on them, they should be given the benefit of the doubt. Where the student's request related to the circumstance of someone close to them and they are able to evidence this, it may be reasonable to accept that there has been an impact on the student, without needing the student to provide separate evidence showing the impact.

Multiple exceptional circumstances requests submitted over a sustained period may be an indication of wider challenges or issues affecting a student's ability to engage with their studies, and faculties may refer students to the [Support to Study procedure](#) where this is felt to be the case.

Students who have ongoing diagnosed medical issues, relating to both physical and mental health conditions, should be advised to approach Additional Learning Support to ascertain whether reasonable adjustments could be considered, applicable to their individual situation. Students would be required to provide evidence for reasonable adjustments to be considered.

The evidence listed in [Appendix 1](#) are examples and do not constitute an exhaustive or approved list of documentation.

2. Guidance for Academic Advisors, Programme teams and other staff responsible for counselling students

Every attempt should be made to ensure that students are aware of the Exceptional Circumstances procedure and follow the requirement to raise the issues as early as possible so we can sign-post to appropriate support with the aim of reducing the overall impact on the student's study.

Staff involved in considering the request should have had no significant prior involvement with the student to avoid any conflict of interest. Exceptional Circumstances Boards should be Chaired by the same individual within each Faculty where possible, to ensure a consistent approach.

The following additional guidance has been written to further assist with conversations around Exceptional Circumstances and provides some questions and prompts to use when students report possible circumstances;

Ask the student if they are aware of support available and sign-post to relevant services.

For cases where time is an issue, check with the student if there was a reason they did not raise it earlier. It is noted that there is a requirement for cultural sensitivity here as some students will be less used to reporting personal issues, depending on their cultural background. The recommendation is to use this as an opportunity to refer to the standard practice and cultural norms at the University and in the UK more generally.

When considering a case, check if the student's situation broadly meets the definition as outlined in the Policy. If the case is not one that meets the Exceptional Circumstances definition, the student should be sign-posted to other support avenues such as Support to Study, Additional Learning Support, SUBU Advice and Guidance services.

If you feel that the case does fit within the definition the next step is to advise the student to submit the form prior to the deadline (the Programme Support Officer can advise on deadlines). As it is essential that students complete all sections appropriately and provide a clear explanation of the impact that the event has had on their studying and assessment practice, a conversation about their normal study and assessment behaviour and what was different because of the event may assist them in completing the form.

If a request for exceptional circumstances includes information that should be considered as a complaint, the student should be directed to '11F – Student Complaints: Policy and Procedure, as necessary.

Students should be reminded that incomplete forms, including missing evidence (where required), will normally not be considered. Students may self-certificate (for illness up to 5 days) by using the standard extension request form. Remember to explain that students can use self-certification for up to 5 days prior to or during the affected assessment.

Use [Appendix 1](#) to describe the sorts of evidence that are acceptable. Staff may also allow students to submit a request with provisional evidence or in lieu of evidence if the student has provided a valid reason why it cannot be submitted at the time. Any extension, exam postponement or Assessment Board consideration of circumstances on this basis would be provisional upon receipt of this evidence. This should be clearly communicated to the student, along with a clear deadline for submission of further evidence.

If speaking to a student the day before, or on the day of submission or exam, where possible alert the relevant Programme Support Officer and Programme Leader to the exchange you have had with the student.

It is important to explain to students as early in the procedure as possible that extensions may not be granted. Additional explanation of what happens at the Assessment Board may be necessary. As outlined in Policy, the Assessment Board will not increase the grades.

All students who have their requests rejected are recommended to talk to their Academic Advisor. It is important that you are able to explain why the request has been rejected and what options the student has at this point.

Academic Appeals on Ground 3 (a valid reason for the submission of late Exceptional Circumstances) should be reserved for those students whose circumstances genuinely resulted in them not being able to submit their request for Board Consideration before the deadlines. Students should be advised of the requirement to evidence not only the circumstance but also the valid reason they were unable to submit in a timely manner. Colleagues are reminded that the majority of G3 Appeals submitted are not upheld due to lack of evidence. Students can be referred to the Programme Support Officer and/or SUBU Advice regarding what evidence is suitable or appropriate.

If you have any questions about the guidance within this document or more generally in relation to the Exceptional Circumstances Policy we recommend speaking to the Faculty Education Service Manager or Programme Support Team Leaders in the first instance.

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Example email communication template (Please note this is an example only, Faculties are encouraged to devise their own templates to best meet their needs) - *italics refers to sections that should be used as applicable and deleted as not applicable*

Dear XXX

Further to your request for an extension on [assessment] / consideration of your circumstances via the Assessment Board which we received on xx/xx/xxxx, I am writing to confirm that

Your extension request has been accepted and your new submission date is xxxxx

Your extension request has not been accepted due to the fact that xxxxx. I would encourage you to contact your unit or programme leader to discuss this.

Your request for Board consideration will be presented to the Circumstances Board on xx/xx/xxxx and you should expect to receive written confirmation of the outcome of this consideration no later than xx/xx/xxxx

Your request was incomplete and I am therefore returning the form to you and this will not be considered until you have [completed xxx sections/ provided xxx evidence/ signed the declaration]. Please be aware that the deadline for submissions is xx/xx/xxxx and forms submitted after this date will not usually be accepted.

Should you have any queries in relation to this communication please let me know

Kind Regards